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He had to trust the strange girl—
or the police and the real killers
would shoot him on sight

Man on the Run

CHARLES WILLIAMS

"Striking suspense technique . . . bitter blend of sex and criminality . . . sharp, unmannered prose style."
New York Times review of "Hell Hath No Fury" by Charles Williams

"Mr. Williams has the narrative knack."
New York Herald Tribune review of "A Touch of Death" by Charles Williams

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by

Charles Williams

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One

Couplings banged together up ahead. We were slowing. I stood up in the swaying gondola and looked forward along the right side of the train. Pinpoints of light showed wetly in the distance. We continued to lose speed.

Then just before we reached the station, the block changed from red to green, the drawbars jerked, and the beat of the wheels began to climb. I cursed. I had to get off and it had to be now; daybreak couldn't be far away. I went over the right side, groping for the ladder. When I had a foot on the last rung I leaned out and jumped, pumping my legs. I landed awkwardly, fell, and rolled.

When I stopped I was lying face down in the mud. I raised my head and turned a little so I could breathe, and rested, wondering if I had broken anything. Wheels and trucks roared past, and then the train was gone. I sat up. My legs and arms seemed to be all right. Less than a hundred yards away, on the other side of the track, was the station, a darker shadow in the night with a single cone of light at this end illuminating the sign. CARLISLE, EL. 8 FT. SANPORT 51 MI. I hadn't got very far. But nowhere would have been far enough. Not this side of the moon.

I was drowned, chilled to the marrow of my bones, and plastered with mud. Cold rain drummed on my head. I swore bitterly and put up a hand. My hat was gone. I began sweeping my hands around in the darkness, slapping at mud and water. It was useless. It had blown off when I jumped and could be two hundred yards away. I'd never find it, and I was wasting precious time. I had to find some place to get out of sight.

I stood up quickly, trying to orient myself. The beach should be across the tracks and beyond the town. I could see the highway paralleling the tracks and two principal streets at right angles to it. I was almost in line with the near one and could see down three or four blocks of it, shiny, deserted, and rainswept in the pools of light under street lamps and in front of store windows. If the beach weren't any further than I remembered, I

should be able to reach it before daybreak and find a summer cottage, but I'd have to circle to avoid those lights.

I turned and started along the tracks, going as fast as I could in the darkness. Then, without warning, a car came out of the street at my back, swinging the corner. I dived and hit the mud just before its headlights swept over me. It was a police cruiser, shooting its spotlight into doorways facing the highway. It turned at the next corner, going back toward the beach.

Two hundred yards ahead I crossed the tracks and the highway and plunged into a dark side street overhung with trees. My teeth chattered with cold. Water sloshed in my shoes. The rain was slowly washing mud out of my hair down across my face. Beyond darkened windows men and women slept in warm beds, touching each other.

The trees and houses began to thin out. Sidewalks gave way to mud, and I was in an area of vacant lots grown up with scrub palmetto. I could hear the fronds clashing and scraping in the cold north wind. In a few minutes I came out on the beach. There was no surf because the wind was blowing offshore. Off to my left were some darker masses of shadow that appeared to be sheds and piers, probably for shrimp boats. It seemed to be growing lighter.

I was past the pier and down on the beach again, on sand. There was no doubt now that time was running out on me; pitch blackness was giving way to a murky and rainswept gray. Then in another few minutes I saw the dark silhouettes of houses on the higher ground above the beach. There were two about fifty yards apart, and then three more farther ahead. There were no lights showing.

I left the water's edge and came up behind the first one. There was a window, but no door, except in the shed that was attached to it on the right. That would be the garage, I thought. The window was dark, but not boarded up. I put my ear against it and listened. There was no sound except the drumming of rain on the roof. Well, what the hell did I expect to hear? If there were people inside they'd be asleep. I circled it warily. In front there was a road surfaced with crushed oyster shells, faintly luminous in the predawn gloom, and two or three anemic transplanted palms clashing in the storm. But there was no car. I stepped softly onto the front porch. There were two windows and a door. The door was locked.

I slipped over and felt the doors of the attached garage. They were secured with a hasp and padlock. But that still wasn't proof there was no car inside. I slipped around in back again, sticking close to the wall to stay married to the dark bulk of the house. In addition to the door, there was a small window in the rear of the garage. It was latched on the inside.

I bumped into something. It was a bamboo pole, leaning against the roof. Using the butt of it, I knocked out one of the small panes of the window. Shards of glass tinkled, not too loudly, on the concrete floor inside. Reversing the pole, I shoved it full length in through the opening and swung it from side to side. It encountered nothing. I groped around inside for the latch, released it, and slid the window open. It took only a moment to wiggle through and fall on the floor inside. I could have cut myself on the glass under me, but I was too numb with exposure to tell or care.

It was growing lighter. After a while I could see the outline of a door going into the house. I stood up and tried it. It was locked. I looked around the garage for something with which to jimmy it open. It was going to turn colder, with this north wind blowing, and another twelve to twenty-four hours in wet clothing might be more exposure than I could stand. There could be blankets inside, or I might even be lucky enough to find dry clothes.

The only tool I could see was an old claw-hammer hanging from two nails on the rear wall beside the window. Maybe I could use it to beat in one of the panels of the door, but it would make enough noise to rouse everybody in this end of the county. Then I noticed it was hinged to swing outward. I pulled one of the nails on which the hammer had been hanging, straightened it, and drove the pins out of the hinges. It took only a minute to pry the door out and set it aside. I released the locking plunger on the inside knob, and rehung the door, driving the pins back in place.

It opened into the kitchen. In the growing light I could make out a small gas stove and refrigerator, then the counter and sink at the rear wall to the left. On the right there was a small dining area with a table and two chairs, and a heavily curtained window. I went through the connecting doorway, trailing water on the floor. It was a large living room. Curtains were drawn over the windows at front and rear, permitting very little light to seep through, but I could see the stone fireplace against the opposite wall and just to the left of it another doorway. I stepped across and peered in. It was

the bedroom. The curtains here were of lighter material, and I could see fairly well. At the right there was a bed with a wine-colored corduroy spread, and a dresser and chest. An open doorway at the left led into the bathroom. This was all of it. The whole place was cold and damp.

Water was still oozing from the ruin of my clothing. I stepped inside the bathroom and stripped, throwing suit, shirt, tie, shoes, underwear, and socks into the tub in one soggy mass. I caught sight of my face in the mirror. One eye was swollen almost shut, and there was a big puffy area on my jaw. I felt the back of my head and winced. As far as I could tell, however, the skin wasn't broken. My right hand was swollen and stiff. Rubbing myself harshly with a towel, I located a blanket in a linen closet in the bedroom, gathered it around me, and lay down on the bed. It was a long time before I began to feel warm. I thought about the hat. It had my initials in it.

I rolled off the bed, feeling lightheaded with the craving for a cigarette. There was a clothes closet beside the dresser; maybe I could find something to put on. There were several things on padded hangers in an atmosphere of sachet, but they were all feminine—two or three cotton dresses, a pair of shorts, some blouses, and a nylon slip. That seemed strange. I located a safety pin on the dresser. Fastening the blanket about my shoulders, I went back to the kitchen.

There was a row of cupboards above the sink. I started yanking them open and hit the jackpot within ten seconds—an unopened carton of cigarettes and a bottle of bourbon more than three-quarters full. I ripped open a pack of cigarettes, found some matches on another shelf, and lighted up. The first drag was sheer ecstasy. I grabbed the whisky and took it straight out of the bottle. Warmth and colored lights exploded inside me, and for a moment I was limp. I put the bottle away and quickly ransacked the rest of the shelves. I found an unopened pound of coffee, several cans of corned beef, a box of crackers, and some jam. I stared at it. I could hide out here for days.

In a few minutes I was drinking scalding black coffee and eating cold corned beef out of the can. I felt a lot better. Pouring another cup of coffee, I dropped a slug of bourbon in it, lighted a cigarette, and carried it out into the living room to explore the place.

Before the fireplace, on a shaggy white rug, was a long coffee table covered with glass. In back of it was a studio couch, and at one end a chaise

longue, both covered with that same wine-red corduroy I'd seen on the bed in the other room. There was a bridge lamp and a small magazine stand at one end of the couch. The floor was rubber-tiled, and in the center of the room was an oval braided rug some eight feet long. Because of the heavy drapes there was still very little light, and it was intensely silent except for the soft and almost soothing sound of the rain.

Near the front window was a large oak desk and a swivel chair. At one end of it was a typewriter stand on which was a covered typewriter. A shaded lamp was suspended from the ceiling above it. There were several books on the desk and a stack of papers held down by an onyx paperweight. In the corner was a small gas heater. The whole wall beside the desk was lined with bookshelves, and near the door going out into the kitchen and dining area was a small table on which was a telephone and a radio in a white plastic case. I went over and turned on the radio, just clicking the switch but leaving the gain all the way down. The pilot light glowed. Maybe I could get some news. I looked at my watch. It had stopped; I'd forgotten to wind it.

Then I was struck by an odd thought. If this were a summer cottage closed for the season, why were the gas, water, and electricity still turned on? Suddenly I heard a car going past outside. I stepped quickly to the front window and pulled the edge of the curtain back just enough to peer out. It was a yellow school bus.

I could see nothing of the cottage next to this one, or in fact any of those on this side, but some hundred yards on down the puddled and rainswept road there was one on the other side. Apparently there were people living in it now. The school bus turned around there and stopped. Two small children in yellow raincoats and hats came out and got in. The bus came back. I let the curtain drop back in place and heard it go on by and fade away. I was just about to turn away from the window when I heard something else. It was another one, passing slowly in the opposite direction. I parted the curtain again and froze.

It was a police cruiser and it was stopping. Two men in black raincoats and uniform caps with plastic rain covers got out, one of them going out of sight in the direction of the cottage next door. The other was turning this way. I dropped the curtain back in place just in time. A heavy step sounded

on the porch, and then the door moved slightly beside my hand as he tried the knob. He rattled it once, and checked the window. I held my breath.

He tested the window at the front of the kitchen. I heard the padlock on the garage doors rap against the wood as he went by and slapped it with a hand to be sure it was fastened. He was going around the side of the garage. The hat, I thought. Somebody had found the damned thing, and now they knew they had me pinned down in this jerkwater town. No, maybe it was just a routine check-up of unoccupied summer cottages—

Then fear hit me in the back like icy water. I'd forgotten that broken pane of glass. And the kitchen door was unlocked!

Somehow I put the coffee cup on the desk without dropping or rattling it and sped toward the kitchen. My bare feet made no sound on the tile. Just as I reached the door I heard him call out to the other one.

"Hey, Roy. Come here!"

He'd discovered the broken window.

I shoved a finger against the button in the center of the knob and pressed. There was only a faint click as it locked, but it seemed to hang there in the silence forever. I breathed again, afraid to move or even take my hand away from the knob.

"Look at this," I heard him say then. "I think he's been here."

Somebody had found the hat. And even with the rain, there'd still be tracks and my long skid marks in the mud, so they'd know I had unloaded from the freight. They probably had the town surrounded by now.

"Knocked it out so he could reach the latch," said a purring and very Southern voice. Roy had come over. "You look inside?"

"You think I'm nuts? He may have a gun."

I wondered where they thought I'd got one. My muscles ached from the tense and rigid position I was in. The cigarette in my left hand was beginning to burn my fingers. I was afraid even to let it fall to the floor; it might sound as if somebody had dropped a piano.

"Come out of there, Foley!" Roy ordered. There was a moment of complete silence, and then he said, "Let me have your flashlight."

"Take it easy, will you?" the other replied. "He's already killed one cop; one more ain't going to bother him."

"We got to see in there."

"Christ—"

“Stand clear.” There was another instant of tense silence, and then Roy’s voice said, “He’s gone. But he’s been here. See all that water on the floor?”

“Yeah.”

The voices dropped to whispers. “He went on into the house through that door. Run around and cover the front. I’m goin’ in.”

“Hadn’t we better call in for help?”

“Help, hell. I’ll get the cop-murderin’ bastard.”

Footsteps sounded on the wet sand outside, and I heard Roy’s body slide through the window and fall onto the floor of the garage. Shoes scraped on concrete, and then he was testing the kitchen door. My hand was still on the knob, and I could feel it move slightly as he rattled it. I tried not to breathe. He tried it again. “Hey, Jim.”

The other came back. “What is it?”

“Door’s locked. And ain’t no sign it’s been forced. Ain’t a scratch on it.”

“Don’t make sense, though, he’d go back out in the rain when he had a dry place to hide.”

“Wait! He’s in there, all right. Look. The garage door was locked, and so was the window, because he had to break it. So this one probably wasn’t. He just went inside and locked it himself.”

I sighed. I didn’t have a chance now.

“No,” one of the voices said quickly, “wait a minute. This door *was* locked. Remember? We checked it the other day when we made the round. Somebody’d left the garage door open and kids had been playin’ in here, so tried this one before we locked up.”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

I wondered how much more of it I could take.

“Sure funny he’d leave without even tryin’ to get in the house. He’d need dry clothes and something to eat.”

“Probably wasn’t anything he could use.”

Oh, sweet Jesus—the hammer! Then I realized I was looking right at it. There on the counter by the sink. I’d carried it inside without realizing it.

“Well, we’re wasting time here. We know he’s around somewhere, so he’s probably broke into one of the others. And we got to search all them shrimp boats.”

Roy climbed out the window, and I heard them drive away. I felt limp as I walked slowly into the living room and collapsed on the couch. When I

crushed out what was left of the cigarette I saw it had burned blisters on my fingers.

Two

In about twenty minutes they came back. There was a little comfort in knowing I had anticipated them on that one. They walked around the house trying the windows they had forgotten the first time. I could hear their footsteps and the murmur of their voices, but I couldn't make out anything they said. They drove away.

I smoked another cigarette and tried to think. I didn't have a chance. The whole area would be saturated with police now that they knew they had me pinned down in this small town. But maybe I could stay in here and outwait them. I had food and a warm place to sleep. If I could remain hidden long enough to convince them I must have got out of the area, they might relax. But then what? Where was I going, and what was I going to do? There was no answer, and thinking about it made my head hurt.

The blanket was a nuisance; it kept flapping open. I found a pair of kitchen shears, cut a hole in the middle of it for my head, and put it on like a poncho. In one of the drawers in the kitchen I found some heavy cotton cord to gather it about me at the waist. It wasn't so bad that way, but I had to start trying to get my clothes dry. I lighted the gas heater and brought in some more of the cord for a clothes line. When I had it strung up in the corner above the heater, I wrung out the clothes in the bathtub and draped them over it. The shoes I put nearby on the floor. My wallet was a soggy ruin. I took the money out and spread it across the top of the desk to dry. It came to one hundred and seventy dollars.

Remembering the radio then, I went over and turned up the gain just enough to hear the station with my ear against the loudspeaker. It was playing some Dixieland jazz. When the record stopped, the disk jockey spieled a commercial and then gave the time. It was nine forty-five. I wound my watch and set it. The music began again. I tried some of the other stations, but there was no news program. Maybe there'd be one at ten o'clock. I switched it off.

The bookshelves were just to the left of the radio. I stood looking at them, and then noticed with surprise that all the books in the top two rows were by the same writer, someone named Suzy Patton. There were at least a hundred of them. They were novels, apparently, in colorful dust jackets. They seemed to be new and untouched, as if they were on the shelves in a bookstore. I started taking them down at random and glancing at them, and I saw they were the same six novels translated into a great many different languages. I could recognize Spanish, French, and Italian, and what I thought was Swedish or Norwegian, but there were some I'd never seen before. They all had the same type of dust jacket, running largely to luscious girls with a great deal of cleavage, bustle, and hoop skirt, and dashing types of men in Confederate uniforms. *Patton? Suzy Patton?* The name was familiar, but I didn't recall having ever read one of the books; I didn't care much for historical novels. But this must be her cottage. I couldn't think of any other reason why all these foreign editions would be stored here.

It was almost ten. I switched on the radio again and hunkered down with my ear against the speaker grill. This time I found a news program. The first half of it was all Washington and Cape Canaveral, and another blizzard in the East. The stock market had opened irregularly lower. "And now for the local news," the announcer continued. Two people were killed in a freeway crash. Some screwball had tried to hold up a branch bank with a water pistol. The Mayor was laid up with Asian flu. Somebody didn't like the schools. Somebody else thought the schools were in great shape. Then I tensed up. Here it was.

"According to a bulletin just received, the intensive manhunt for Russell Foley, seaman from this area, has been localized this morning in the vicinity of Carlisle, on the Gulf coast some fifty miles west of Sanport. Police report a brown hat similar to the one Foley was wearing when last seen, and bearing the initials R.F., was found near the railroad station in Carlisle just after dawn, together with tracks and long skid marks in the mud beside the right-of-way, indicating he had leaped from a moving freight train. Police believe he is almost certainly hiding out somewhere in the town. All exits from the area have been closed by roadblocks set up by local police, Sheriff's Department officers, and the Highway Patrol.

“Foley is sought for questioning in connection with the slaying last night of Charles L. Stedman, Sanport detective, during a savage fight in Stedman’s apartment. Police, summoned by occupants of an adjoining apartment, arrived just minutes after Stedman’s assailant had left the building. When they received no answer to their knocks, they forced the door and found Stedman dead of a knife wound. The assailant, allegedly recognized as Foley by two other tenants in the building, made his way to a bar in the next block, but escaped by way of a rear exit a few moments later.

“Foley, third mate of the Southlands Oil Company tanker *Jonathan Dancy*, was formerly a tenant in the same building. His estranged wife, Denise Foley, is believed to be in Reno, obtaining a divorce. When last seen he was wearing a brown gabardine suit, white shirt, brown striped tie, and the brown hat believed to be that found near the railroad tracks in Carlisle. He is described as being twenty-seven years old, six-foot-one, one hundred and ninety pounds, with coppery red hair, and blue eyes. The police are convinced his face and hands will still bear bruises and cuts suffered in the fight which preceded the stabbing.”

That was all. I turned off the radio, feeling sick. There was no description of the knife or whatever it was he was stabbed with, and no mention of anyone else at all. It had to be somebody who was already in the apartment and knew the back way out, down the service stairs, but I hadn’t seen anybody else or even any sign of anybody. Losing my head and running when I learned he was dead had been stupid—there was no doubt of that—but it hadn’t really made it any worse. It couldn’t be any worse.

I went out into the kitchen and poured another drink of whisky. Then fatigue, exposure, and twelve straight hours of running and being afraid hit me all at once. I grabbed another blanket, and the minute I lay down on the studio couch I melted and ran all over it. When I awoke it was still raining and gusts of wind were shoving at the house. There was about the same amount of light in the room, and for a moment I thought I’d been asleep for only a few minutes. Then I looked at my watch and saw it was after three. I was sweaty and tangled in the blankets as if I’d been thrashing and turning. I was just reaching for a cigarette when I went tense all over, listening. It was the sound of a car door being shut.

Had they come back to prowl around some more? I sprang off the couch and slipped across to the front window. Pulling back the drape a fraction of

an inch, I peered out and felt the skin tighten up between my shoulder-blades. It wasn't the police; it was worse. The car was a blue Oldsmobile, and it was stopped in front of the garage.

There was nowhere I could hide, and I couldn't run, with nothing on but a blanket. There was nothing I could do but stand there helplessly and watch. No one was in the car, but I could hear the rattle of the hasp as the driver unlocked the garage. Then she came suddenly into view, a tall woman in a dark coat, holding a plastic raincoat over her head and shoulders. She seemed to sway slightly, as if leaning against the wind, as she opened the car door and slid in behind the wheel. One of the doors blew shut, and she had to get out again and prop it open with something. She got back in and drove into the garage.

I ran into the kitchen. The moment she walked in she'd see the open can of food and the coffee, and I had to grab her before she could back out and run. I could hear the car's engine, still running, and then the click of high heels on concrete. The garage doors slammed shut in a heavy gust of wind that shook the cottage. I waited tensely inside the door. Nothing happened. Maybe she'd gone outside and was going to come in through the front door. I ran back, slipping noiselessly across the tile, and listened beside the window. There was no one on the porch, unless she was standing utterly still. I parted the drape enough to peer. out. She was nowhere in sight. Rain was beating across the porch and against the window.

I hurried back to the kitchen again and stood silently with my ear against the door, waiting for the sound of footsteps. She must be getting something out of the car. It had been several minutes now since she'd driven in. I could still hear the car's engine running, just barely audible above the sound of the rain. Had she discovered the broken pane of glass in that window and run out? No, that was ridiculous. Anyway, if something had scared her she'd have backed the car out. I waited, growing more puzzled with every minute. There was something spooky about it. Why didn't she at least shut off the engine? I could smell carbon monoxide beginning to seep in around the edge of the door. Was she trying to commit suicide?

I unlocked the door and gently pushed it open a few inches. Even with the broken pane of glass in the window, the exhaust smell was overpowering. I didn't see her anywhere. It was almost dark with the front doors closed, but the left-hand door of the car was open, so the ceiling light

was on, and I could see she wasn't in it. Where could she have gone? The car practically filled the garage. I looked farther back then and saw her—or rather, I saw an arm and a hand in back of the rear wheel on this side. She'd fallen between the rear of the car and the garage doors, and was lying right under the tailpipe.

I jumped down the two steps, opened the car door on this side, and shut off the ignition. Already beginning to choke on the fumes, I knelt, caught her by both arms, and pulled her out from under the overhang of the trunks. She was a big woman, and heavy, with the limp, dead weight of the unconscious. I was gasping by the time I got her across my shoulder. I hurried into the kitchen, kicked the door shut, and sped toward the bedroom with her. Rolling her off onto the bed, I turned her on her back just under the window and put a hand on her chest. She was still breathing. I parted the drape. The window was a casement type. I unlatched one side and cranked it open a few inches to catch the wind. Holding the bottom of the drape, I forced the blast of fresh air down across her face. She had on lipstick, so it was impossible to tell whether her lips were blue or not, but the color of the rest of her face seemed to be all right. A few drops of ram blew in on her, and she stirred faintly. She was going to come around, all right, but if I'd waited another five minutes before going out there she'd have been dead.

She'd probably been hit by that door when it slammed shut. Then I remembered the way she'd weaved as she got back in the car the first time, and bent down to sniff her breath. At least part of Suzy Patton's trouble—if this was Suzy Patton—was that she was crocked to the teeth. I didn't know how carbon monoxide and alcohol mixed in the human system, but I had a hunch she was going to be a very sick girl in a few minutes. I slipped off the high-heeled sling pumps and kicked open the bathroom door. She began to retch. I half-led and half-carried her and held her up. When she was through being sick, I wet a wash cloth at the basin and bathed her face while she leaned weakly against the bathroom wall with her eyes closed. She didn't open them until she was back on the bed. She took one look at me and said, "Oh, good God!" and closed them again. She made a feeble attempt to pull her skirt down. I straightened it for her, and she lay still. I went out in the living room and lighted a cigarette. I could handle her all right, but if the police came by again and noticed those garage doors were unlocked, I was

dead. I looked at my watch. It would be at least three more hours before it was dark.

I stood in the doorway and looked at her. She was a big girl and a striking one, with blonde hair almost as white as cotton. Close to five-nine, I thought. Probably thirty to thirty-three years old. She wore her hair in one of those short haircuts they used to call Italian; I didn't know what they were called now. She was dressed in a dark skirt, soft dark sweater, and a rust-colored shorty coat. She wore gold earrings, and an expensive-looking watch, but no rings of any kind. It was a handsome face, and even as sick as she was now there was the stamp of vitality on it.

I went out and heated the coffee. When I came back with a cup of it she was sitting up on the edge of the bed holding her head. "Try a little of this," I said.

She sighed. "Are you still here? I thought I'd died and gone to hell."

She didn't seem to be particularly scared. Probably the way she felt at the moment she considered that anything that could happen to her now would have to be for the better. I held out the coffee, and she took a sip of it. I lighted a cigarette and passed it over.

She took a drag on it and shuddered. "What happened?"

"I pulled you out from under the back of your car. One of the garage doors must have conked you."

She felt the back of her head. She winced. "I remember now. And the engine was still running, wasn't it? I tried to get up and passed out."

"That's about the size of it," I said.

She looked up at me and shook her head. "I think you're out of focus. You look like Spartacus, and sound like Sergeant Friday. Who are you, and how'd you get in here?"

"My name's Foley," I said. "And I broke in."

"Oh. Then you must be the one they're looking for. Those roadblocks out on the highway."

"Are they searching the cars?"

"Just slowing them down, I think, and looking in. I was too busy being sober to pay much attention."

I held out the coffee again. She drank a little more of it. "Why are they looking for you?" she asked.

"They think I killed a policeman."

She glanced up quickly. “Oh. I think that was in the paper this morning. Something about a fight.”

“That’s it,” I said. I set the coffee on the dresser. “How do you feel now?”

“Terrible. But thanks for pulling me out of there. You saved my life, such as it is.”

“Is anybody meeting you here?” I asked.

“No. Why?”

“I had to know. Is this your cottage?” She nodded.

“Then you’re Suzy Patton?”

“That’s right. Suzy Patton, the has-been. The written-out writer.”

I wondered if she were still drunk. “What do you mean?”

“Never mind,” she said. “It’s something an ex-writer never attempts to explain to a non-writer. There’s no language, if you follow me.”

”I probably don’t,” I said. “But it doesn’t matter. Just keep quiet, and don’t try to call the police or get out of here.”

“Are you trying to threaten me?” she asked.

“Don’t get tough,” I told her. “I’m not going to hurt you, but I’ll tie you up if I have to.”

“What do you expect to gain by that?”

“Time. If I can hide out long enough, they may think I’ve got away, and I can get out.”

She had clear gray eyes that didn’t seem to be afraid of much of anything. “That’s a stupid procedure. Why don’t you give yourself up?”

“I’d get life. Or the electric chair. Cut it out.”

“They’ll catch you sooner or later. You know that.”

“I’m not trying to make any long-range plans,” I said coldly. “They’re after me, and if they get me it’s going to be rugged. I’m operating one minute at a time. When I’ve used up this minute, I’ll start on the next one.”

“And in the meantime you’re going to add a charge of kidnaping to make it worse?”

“It doesn’t get any worse,’ ‘I said.

“So you intend to stay here?”

“That’s right.”

She sighed. “Well, could I get my purse out of the car? Or is that against the rules?”

“We’ll both go get it. That is, if you think you can walk now.”

“I’m all right. Except I’ve got a splitting headache.” She slipped her shoes on and stood up. She seemed to be steady enough. We went out through the kitchen.

“Wait there by the door,” I said. “I’ll get it.” I stepped down into the garage, keeping an eye on her. She made no attempt to run back and get out the front door. I brought the purse in. She drew some water at the tap and swallowed a couple of aspirin she took from the purse. We went back into the living room. I walked over and felt my clothes. The shirt and shorts were fairly dry, but the suit was still soggy. When I looked around she’d gone into the bedroom. Maybe she was trying to get out the window. I ran to the doorway and looked in. She was standing before the mirror of the dresser, calmly touching up her lipstick. She glanced at me inquiringly. “What’s the matter?”

”I thought you might be trying to get out.”

“In that rain? Don’t be silly.” She pressed her lips together, surveyed the result, and dropped the lipstick back in the purse. Then she combed her hair. She was a very smart-looking girl. And spectacular. And about as unflustered as they came.

“You don’t scare easily, do you?”

“Not any more,” she said. She dropped the comb in the purse and looked at me. “Should I?”

“Why not?”

She gave me a crooked smile. “I’ve had two unsuccessful marriages. I’m over thirty. I’m utterly alone. And I’m washed up as a writer. So what are you going to do to me, Mr. Foley? Think of something.”

“All right. But just don’t try to get out of here.”

“Who said I was going to? This is my cottage, isn’t it? I don’t intend to be chased out of it by some displaced gladiator hiding from the police.”

I tried to read what went on behind that face, but I got nowhere. There was a chance, of course, that she was unworried because somebody *was* meeting her here. And when he arrived I couldn’t handle the two of them. Well, all I could do was sweat that out along with the rest of it.

Three

Wind shook the house again, and rain slashed at the windows. It was a little after four now, and in another two hours it should be growing dark. I could hear the rattle of the hasp and padlock once in awhile as gusts of wind battered at the garage doors. She was sitting on the chaise longue by the coffee table, calmly smoking a cigarette.

“Didn’t the paper say you were a merchant marine officer?” she asked.

“That’s right,” I said. “Third mate on a tanker.”

“Then why the trouble with a policeman? You’re not a criminal.”

“It was personal,” I replied. “Had nothing to do with his being a cop.”

“Did you go there with the intention of killing him?”

“No.”

“Then why did you?”

“I didn’t.”

“What?”

I heard a car coming along the road. Whirling, I slipped to the window and peered out. It was a police cruiser, going slowly past with its windshield swipes beating against the rain. It went on. In a few minutes it came back by, and I had to go through the whole thing again. It went past without slackening speed. They hadn’t noticed. I sighed. She said something.

“What?” I asked, turning away from the window.

“Was that a police car?”

I nodded.

“Why are you so worried? They have no reason to try to come in here.”

I told her about their being here before. “If they find out your car’s here now, they’re going to come in just to be sure you’re all right.”

“Oh,” she said. “So that’s the reason we can’t have a fire in the fireplace?”

”Of course.”

“What will you do if they do come?”

I shrugged. “What can I do? If you don’t go to the door they’ll know something’s wrong and they’ll come in anyway. They seem to think I have a gun.”

I reached out to feel the clothes again. The suit was still damp. When I turned she was watching me. She looked away. It was the second or third time I’d caught her doing that, and I wondered what she was thinking.

“Were you armed when you went to that detective’s apartment?” she asked.

“No,” I said.

“Were you drunk?”

“I’d had five or six drinks.”

“You must have known he might be armed. After all, he was a policeman.”

“I suppose so,” I said irritably. “I didn’t even think about it. All I was interested in at the time was bending his fat face for him. And as for having a gun myself, I could have thrown away twenty of them by this time. With the case I’ve got, a lawyer would tell me to plead guilty and pray.”

She shook her head. “I thought the paper said he was killed with a knife. That should prove you didn’t have a gun, or you’d have used it. Whose knife was it? His?”

“How do I know?” I said. “I didn’t see it.”

“You’re not really serious about that?”

“Of course not. The electric chair just brings out the clown in me. How’d you like to see my impersonation of Red Skelton?”

“Don’t get sarcastic. I’m not forcing you to stay here.” She lay back on the chaise longue and gestured toward the couch with her cigarette. “Why don’t you sit down and tell me about it?”

“What do you care?” I asked.

“I probably don’t. But if we’re going to stay cooped up together the rest of our lives, we might as well talk.”

I sat down, diagonally across the coffee table from her, and lighted a smoke. “I’d had trouble with him before. About two weeks ago I threatened to knock his roof in if he didn’t watch his step. It was in front of witnesses, so that helps too. Don’t bother telling me that sort of thing is stupid; I know it, but when it comes to characters like Stedman I’ve got a very short fuse.

He’s a Lover Boy, one of those big, flashy, conceited types that has to spread himself out as much as possible to give all the girls a break. Especially the ones whose husbands are away a lot.

“My wife used to be a nightclub singer. We’ve been married about a year. It didn’t work out very well, because it’s no cinch being married to a guy on a tanker unless you just like being alone most of the time. We run up the East Coast and back like a commuter train, gone fifteen days and home one, except that we do get a long vacation once a year. She couldn’t take it. Last trip in I found out she’d been running around with Stedman. He was single and had an apartment there in the same building, the Wakefield, in the 1200 block on Forest Avenue. We had a real fight about it, and the same night I ran into Stedman in the Sidelines Bar, up in the next block, and had a few words with him. The owner of the place is a good friend of mine, though, and he broke it up and talked me out of starting anything.

“Last evening when we docked, I got the word. About the divorce, I mean. She was in Reno, along with the car and most of the joint checking account. Around nine o’clock I came uptown from the refinery and stopped in the Sidelines for a few drinks, and the more I thought about it the more burned up I got. I mean, I wasn’t broken up about it—hell, we were about washed up anyway—but I don’t like being played for a sucker, at least not by types like Stedman. So I went up to his apartment.

“When he opened the door and saw who it was he tried to shut it again, but I pushed my way in and belted him one. He wasn’t wearing the gun and holster, of course, because he was off duty, but he was a long way from being a pushover. He was a little heavier than I am, and he could really punch. We made a hell of a mess out of his living room. The apartment-house manager started pounding on the door and saying he was going to call the police. We were both pretty well banged up and winded after about five minutes of it. When I went out Stedman was on his knees in the middle of the living room trying to get up, and I wasn’t in much better shape myself. I was groggy from some of the punches I’d taken, and I had blood on my hands and clothes from some of the cuts I’d opened on his face. The manager was gone from the hallway, but I met two tenants who knew me, at least by sight. I went back to the Sidelines, but before I got there I heard the siren and saw the police cruiser pull up in front of the Wakefield. At the bar, I went on through to the washroom to clean up. It took three or four minutes

to get the blood off and straighten out my clothes, and then I heard some cops come in the front looking for me. I ducked out the back way into the alley. I didn't want to spend the night in jail and take a chance on missing my ship in the morning. I figured that by the time I got back from the next trip it'd have blown over and at the most I'd just have to go in and pay a fine. It was starting to rain by then. I ducked into a movie.

"It was around one in the morning when I came out I called the Sidelines and asked Red Lanigan if the dust had settled enough so I could come back and have a drink, and that's when the roof started to fall in. He pretended I was somebody else and said Stedman had died of a knife wound and that the police were taking the city apart trying to find a sailor named Foley. I thought he was kidding, but before I could say anything else he hung up on me. I called Stedman's apartment. A man answered without saying who he was, and it wasn't Stedman's voice at all. It still didn't make any sense, but I was beginning to be scared. I flagged a cab, thinking I'd ride by the apartment house and see if there were police cars in front of it. But the driver kept watching me in his mirror. At first I thought it was because of the shiner and the bruises on my face, but then I began to wonder. Maybe the police had broadcast my description. I paid him off and got out, high-tailed it in the other direction, and ducked into an alley, and in less than two minutes the corner where I'd got out was surrounded with police cars. I guess I lost my head completely then. They almost got me twice in the next hour, and the last time was near the railroad yards. I lost them in the dark and the rain. Then I saw a freight pulling out. I ran and got aboard and climbed down into a gondola."

She shook her head. "That's probably the most fantastic story I ever heard."

"Right," I said. "So I ought to give myself up and try it on them for laughs?"

"There wasn't any knife involved in the fight? And you didn't see one?"

"No," I said.

"And he was on his knees, still alive, when you went out?"

"That's right. He might have had just a shade the worst of the fight, but he wasn't badly hurt, any more than I was. He was a pretty tough boy."

"Did you close the door when you went out?"

“I suppose so. I was pretty groggy, but it would be the natural thing to do.”

She nodded. “You say the manager was gone, presumably to call the police, but there were other people in the corridor?”

“That’s right. There was a woman about half out of the doorway of the next apartment. She’d probably already called the police. At least, according to the radio news I heard, it was somebody next door. I don’t know what her name was, but I knew her by sight, and I suppose she knew me. She ducked back when she saw me come out of Stedman’s door. And then I met another tenant on the stairs—”’

She gestured with the cigarette. “That’s not what I mean. Apparently there’s no question of identification. But when -you came out, this woman couldn’t have seen into his living room? And verified that he was still alive?’

“Not a chance,” I said. “She was in her own doorway, on the same side of the corridor.”

“And how long do you suppose it was from the time you left and the police got there and found him dead?

“I don’t know.” I said. “Somewhere between three and five minutes, probably. I walked down a flight of stairs and out the front of the building, and I was about a block away when the cruiser pulled up at the entrance. They had to find out which apartment, and then force the door—”

“How do you know they had to force it?”

“That’s what the radio said.”

She nodded. “Then you must have closed it, and it was self-locking.”

”Probably. Unless he closed it, or somebody else went in or out after I did.”

“No,” she said. “That woman wouldn’t have given up her ring-side seat. She’d have stayed right there watching the hall until the police arrived. If anybody else had gone in or out, she’d have said so.”

“Then there had to be somebody else already in the apartment when I got there.”

“How would he get out?”

“Through the kitchen and down the back stairway that leads to the garage in the basement. There’s an exit to the alley on the ground floor.”

“Hmmm,” she said. “But you didn’t see anybody else in the apartment:”

“No. But I was only in the living room.”

“You didn’t see a coat, wrap, hat, or a purse, or anything?”

“No. I wouldn’t have noticed, though, if there had been one. I was boiling, and all I saw was Stedman.”

“If there were somebody there, why would he suddenly decide to kill Stedman? Presumably, it would be a friend or acquaintance.”

“Or one of his girl friends. I don’t know. All I know is that he was all right when I went out of the room, and less than five minutes later he was dead.”

“Do you think anybody will ever believe it?”

“Of course not. Why do you think I ran?”

“It does have one thing in its favor,” she said. “It’s stupid enough to be true. Anybody could make up a better story.”

I shrugged and got up to prowl restlessly around the room. Light was fading now inside the house. I turned, and her eyes were on me. This time she didn’t look away. She shook her head musingly.

“I keep trying to decide whether you look more like a Roman gladiator,” she said, “or some raffish medieval monk who got caught in the wrong bedroom.”

“Well, my clothes will be dry in a little while.”

“Oh, I don’t mind. It’s a fascinating combination—a cassock and a black eye.”

There was something provocative in her tone, and when I turned quickly to look at her I saw the same thing in her eyes. I walked over beside her. She moved over almost imperceptibly, and I sat down on the edge of the chaise.

“Can’t we have a fire?” she asked teasingly.

“No.”

“Think how cozy it would be,” She smiled. “An open fire and the sound of the rain.”

“And the police kicking in the doors.”

“Maybe I’d send them away.”

“Sure you would,” I said.

“You don’t think so?” She ran a finger gently along the bruise on my jaw. “Does that hurt?”

“No,” I said. I kissed her. Her lips parted and her arms tightened fiercely around my neck. Then she was whispering against my mouth. “It’s the way you look in that garment. I haven’t been able to keep my eyes off you.”

I kissed her again. She made a little whining sound in her throat, but then she twisted away from me and stood up. Her face was flushed and her breathing ragged as she eluded my hands and ran toward the next room. I caught her beside the bed.

“It’s so cold in here,” she whispered. “Did you close that window?”

I reached out across the bed to pull the drape aside to make sure, and while I was off balance she hit me with a shoulder and both arms. I spun around, landed on the corner of the bed, and slid to the floor. She ran out into the living room and slammed the door shut. I got up, raging. She’d play hell getting away with that; there was no lock on the door.

I hit it on the run, turning the knob and starting to lunge through after her. It opened six inches or so, and stopped abruptly, and I slammed into it face-first. Something was holding it at the bottom. I could hear the sound of her heels as she ran out into the kitchen. Wild now, I backed off and hit the door again as hard as I could. The top sprang outward a few inches, but the bottom scarcely moved. I heard the car door close out in the garage and then the engine starting. I lunged frantically at the door, and this time I managed to fight my way around the edge of it. It was too late. She was backing out of the garage. I ran to the front window just in time to see her get out with the plastic raincoat over her head, lock the garage doors, and then calmly get back in the car and drive off. She knew she was safe once she was outside the house.

I turned away, swearing bitterly, and lighted a cigarette. There was no use even trying to run; they’d be here in less than five minutes. Damn her, anyway; this was the thanks I got for saving her life. Then I cursed myself for being so stupid as to leave the keys in the car. I’d forgotten about them in the urgency of getting her out of that carbon monoxide. And now I’d let her make a complete sap of me.

But how had she jammed the door? It didn’t matter now, but I went over and looked at it. It was clever. She’d jammed the end of the fireplace poker under it. The poker had a large handle, so it acted as a wedge; the harder I’d shoved, the tighter it had jammed. Suzy was a clever girl. I called her that and several other things.

I went over and yanked my clothes off the line and started dressing. She'd find a police car inside half a mile, and I might as well be ready when they got here. I wadded up the blanket and threw it savagely across the room. I stopped to listen, but heard nothing except the rain. A minute passed, and another, while I put on trousers, shirt, and shoes. What were they doing, sneaking up on me? She must have told them I had no gun. I went to the window and peered out. The road was deserted and rainswept in the gathering dusk, with no cars in sight anywhere.

A full hour went by before I dared believe it. She hadn't reported that I was here. I wondered why? Had she been in a wreck?

* * *

Before it was fully dark, I ate some more of the corned beef and drank a cup of coffee. I turned off the gas heater for fear it might be seen through the drapes, made sure the outside doors were locked, and curled up on the couch with a blanket. The rain went on. It had a lonely sound.

The *Dancy* would have sailed this afternoon, and by now she'd have made her departure from the sea-buoy and be shouldering her way southeastward toward the Florida Straits: I lighted a cigarette and took a quick look at the time. I'd just now be going up to the bridge in oilskins to take over the watch. Homesickness and longing swept over me. I shoved them out of my mind.

In the morning it was still raining, not as hard now, but with a steady gray drizzle that looked as if it might go on for a week. I made some coffee and listened to the radio news. The police were still convinced they had me surrounded in the vicinity of Carlisle and were continuing their search. The only thing to do was stay right here as long as I could. There was no way to account for her not going to the police, but she hadn't, so presumably she wasn't going to. I searched the place, trying to find a razor so I could shave, but there was none. The black eye was still puffy and badly discolored; it would be days before it disappeared. And by that time the ginger-colored beard would be worse. Either way, I'd attract attention. It seemed hopeless.

The day dragged on. I searched the rows of Suzy's books until I found an English edition and tried to read. It was laid in New Orleans during the Civil War and was full of intrigue and sizzling bedroom scenes. Most of the

girls were petite and blonde, with a high degree of inflammability and a low flash-point. Their descriptions were like scaled-down versions of Suzy herself; and thinking of them reminded me of her and made me uncomfortable. After awhile I put the book away. And just at dusk I heard a car drive up and stop in front of the garage. I peered out. It was Suzy.

Four

She drove in, closed the garage, and ran up onto the front porch. I heard her key in the lock. She came in and quickly shut the door. She was wearing another sweater and skirt outfit, and a dark coat, and her face was slightly damp with the rain. She had a briefcase under her arm.

I started to say something, but she shook her head warningly. Coming close, she whispered against my ear. “There are some men out in the road, on foot. We’ve got to hurry. I came back to get you out of here.”

“How?” I asked. “And why?”

“There’s no time for questions. Put on your coat and take down that clothesline, while I empty the ashtrays and get rid of the food cans. We can’t leave any trace of you here.”

I put on the coat, gathered up my wallet, stuffed the tie in my pocket, and put away the line. She swiftly put the place in order and picked up the blanket I’d used for a poncho. She motioned for me to follow her. We went out in the garage. The light was almost gone now, and I could scarcely see the outline of the car. She unlocked the trunk. I could just make out that the spare tire had been removed, and that there were some blankets in it, and a topcoat and hat.

She put her lips against my ear. “Get in. I fixed it so you’ll be able to breathe in there.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Sanport. That’s the safest place for you now. Hurry up. They’re going to start searching these cottages.”

I climbed in and curled up on the blankets. She lowered the cover slowly to gauge the clearance, and then pushed it down until the latch clicked. I was locked in. It occurred to me now that it was too late, that I was completely at her mercy. All she had to do was drive up to the nearest patrol car or police station and hand me over like an oyster on the half shell, if she wanted. She’d be sticking her neck out a mile by helping me, and yet I’d

accepted her story without question. But still, if she'd wanted to turn me in, she would have done it yesterday. Wouldn't she? I didn't know. Nothing made any sense now.

I heard the tapping of her heels as she went back in the house. In two or three minutes she returned, put something in the car, and opened the garage doors. She backed the car out. I could hear rain drumming on the metal just above my face. She closed the garage, and was just getting back in the car when I heard another splashing through the puddles in the road behind us. It stopped. Little chills ran up my spine as I heard the growl and chatter of a police radio. Men were getting out. They walked up to the side of the car.

"Miss Patton?" one of them asked.

"Why, yes," she said coolly. "What is it?"

"We're searching these cottages for that man Foley that's hid out around here. Were you just inside there?"

"Just for a few minutes," she replied. "I came back for these papers I forgot when I was out here yesterday. Why?"

"You didn't see any sign he'd broke in?"

"No-o. Everything seemed to be all right."

"Were you in all the rooms?"

"Yes," she said. "But, wait. I did notice yesterday that somebody had broken a pane of glass in the garage window—"

"We know about that. Well, we won't keep you any longer."

They came back past the side of the car, got in the cruiser, and went on down the road. I sighed with relief. She backed on out of the driveway, stopped, and started ahead. In a moment I felt the car make a right turn. We were on one of the main streets that went up through town and bisected the highway. I began to hear other cars passing. Traffic grew heavier, and twice we stopped for traffic lights. I could hear pedestrians crossing. Then we turned right once more and began to go faster. We were on the highway. Then, abruptly, we slowed and began to inch along. We stopped and then started slowly ahead again. The road block, I thought. I heard a police radio again, not much more than an arm's length away, and a man's voice said, "All right, lady." We began to gather speed. I exhaled slowly. We were beyond them.

I tried to guess where she was taking me, and why, but gave up. She'd said back to Sanport, and if I'd guessed all the turns correctly, that was the

direction we were headed now, but what part of town she meant and what she was up to were a complete mystery. I tried to guess what time it was, and thought it must be after six. It was probably dark outside, judging from the impenetrable blackness here in the trunk. I could move a little, and there seemed to be plenty of air. I listened to the high whine of tires on wet pavement and hoped she was a good driver. Locked in the trunk of a flaming wreck would be a horrible way to die. Then I wondered if I didn't have enough to worry about now, without borrowing more.

After what could have been anywhere from half an hour to an hour she slowed and made another turn. The sounds changed. There weren't nearly as many cars hurtling past in the other direction. They dwindled until we seemed to be almost alone on the road, and then the road itself was different. We were off the pavement, and she was driving more slowly. I thought I heard surf. She stopped and cut off the engine. I could hear the rain again, drumming gently on the metal above me. Then she was inserting the key in the lock.

I climbed out. She had cut the headlights, but I could make out that we were on a strip of deserted beach with a light surf running up on the sand just beyond us. In back was the dark line of some sort of low vegetation like salt cedar. Rain fell gently on my head.

"Get the topcoat and hat," she said, and ducked back in the car.

I took them out, closed the trunk, and got in beside her. I could just see the pale blur of her face and the blonde head. "Where are we?" I asked.

"West Beach, just south of the airport," she replied. "We're safe enough. On a night like this there won't be many cars around."

"You're going to drop me here? Is that it?"

"I'm not going to drop you at all. That is, unless you want to be dropped. Do you?"

"Don't make jokes," I said. "But why are you sticking your neck out like this? They could make it plenty rough for you."

"I know," she said. "Here." She took cigarettes from her purse and punched in the lighter on the dash. In the soft orange glow as she lighted hers, I could see the outline of her face and the alert and faintly cynical gray eyes.

"What's the deal?" I asked.

“No deal,” she said coolly. “Except you might interest me. That’s possible.”

“Why didn’t you notify the police when you got away yesterday? I thought that’s what you did it for.”

“It was, naturally. But after I got away, I found I couldn’t. I’m not sure just why. Maybe it was because you saved my life—in spite of the fact I’m not positive it’s worth saving. Anyway, I went on home and said nothing about it, thinking I’d just let you hide out there until you had a chance to sneak out and get away.”

‘Then why did you come back?”

“Several reasons. In the first place, I started thinking about your story and began checking it. It’s interesting. And then it occurred to me that if you were caught in the cottage I might be implicated and charged with harboring a fugitive. After all, it could be proved I’d been out there after you’d broken in and therefore must know you were in the place and hadn’t reported it. So it would be safer to go all the way and get you out of there to a place where they couldn’t find you. Then this afternoon I read in the paper that they were thinking of searching all those cottages.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“My apartment,” she said. “Sanport is the last place they’d think of looking for you now, and you’ll be completely out of sight until your face heals. I’ve got you some more clothes. But we’re going to have to wait until after midnight before we try to sneak you in there. In the meantime, there are a lot of things I want to tell you.”

“And a couple I’d like to tell you,” I said. “I think you’re wonderful. And thanks a million.”

I made a move toward her. She put a hand in my chest. “Easy, boy. Don’t start that parked-car routine. We’re not teen-agers. And I said I wanted to talk to you.”

“All right. What is it?”

“First, I want to ask a question. How well do you think you can trust your friend Red Lanigan? Tell me something about him.”

”Why?” I asked.

“What do you know about Red?”

“Practically nothing, except that I talked to him today.”

“Does he know who you are?”

“No,” she replied. “I called him on the phone and merely said I was a friend of yours and that I might be able to help you. What I was doing, of course, was checking your story—or at least the part of it he would know. And he told it the same way. I think you’re telling the truth. I’m also beginning to believe there *was* somebody in Stedman’s apartment when you got there. And I gathered Lanigan thinks there’s a possibility of it also. What about him?”

“He’s a pretty nice guy. Used to be a pro-football player, linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers. I used to play a little football myself in high school, and I’m a nut on the pro game, so we got pretty chummy in the couple of years I’ve known him. That’s a neighborhood bar, and I lived up in the next block, you know. That is, when I was in port. So I was one of the regulars; you know how those neighborhood places are. Sometimes we go fishing together during my vacation. It was Red that stopped me from climbing on Stedman there in the bar last trip. Stedman used to hang out there quite a bit too, you know. Along with several other detectives. But what’s it all about?”

“I think he’s got something he wants to tell you. About a girl.”

“What girl?” I asked quickly.

“That’s it. He doesn’t know, except he thinks Stedman might have been involved with her.”

“Stedman was involved with plenty of girls. Including my wife.”

“I know,” she said. “Lanigan told me a little about him. And, incidentally, your wife *is* in Reno, in case you’ve wondered. The police checked through the Nevada police.”

‘’Why?” I asked.

“Trying to establish your motive. She admitted going out to nightclubs with Stedman a couple of times, but said that was as far as it went.”

“Sure, sure,” I said. “He was just a Boy Scout. Everybody knows that. But what about this other girl?”

“He didn’t tell me much. I gathered it was just an idea he had, but he wants you to get in touch with him. He suggested you call the pay phone there in the bar. He gave me the number. You don’t suppose that could be a trap? I mean, that the police would tap it?”

I thought about it. “No. I don’t think so. Red’s got too much to lose to put himself out on a limb by helping me hide from the police, but I don’t

think he'd double-cross me. He wants to use the pay phone because it's in a booth and he could talk without being heard all over the bar. Where could I get to a phone without being seen?"

"My apartment," she said. "But it'll be hours before we can get you in there without running into somebody."

"Maybe a service station—"

"Wait," she interrupted. "I know. That Playland on the beach at the end of Tarleton Boulevard. It's closed this time of year, but there are some booths on the sidewalk."

"Do you mind?" I asked.

"Let's go," she replied. "Put on the topcoat and hat. And turn the collar up."

It was less than ten miles straight up the beach, a sort of miniature Coney Island about five miles from downtown Sanport. We met few cars. The two amusement piers, closed down for the winter, were dark and foreboding in the rain. She slowed. On the left all the concessions were shuttered and the only illumination came from the street lights. I could see the shadowy arc of the Ferris wheel and the uneven dark tracery of the roller coaster.

"There's one," she said.

The white booth was on the left, near the entrance to a boarded-up chile parlor. She stopped and dug a slip of paper from her purse. "Here's the number. And a dime, if you don't, have change."

I slid out of the car and crossed the street with my coat collar turned up and the hat brim slanted across my face. A car went past, but I was across ahead of its lights. When I closed the door of the booth its light came on. I hunched over the instrument, with my back to the sidewalk, feeling naked. I dialed.

"Sidelines Bar," a man's voice answered. I hoped it wasn't one of Red's friends on the Force.

"Red Lanigan there?" I asked.

"Just a minute."I heard him call out "Hey, Red!" The jukebox was playing a Cuban number. I waited, listening to the rain on the overhead of the booth.

"Hello. Lanigan speaking."

"Red, I hear you wanted me to call."

“Who’s this? Oh—Bill, where the hell are you? I thought you were coming over.” I heard him push the door shut, and then he went on, talking quietly and rapidly. “Jesus, Irish, that was a man from Homicide that answered the phone. They were, just talking about you. Listen—don’t tell me where you are; I don’t want to know. Your girl friend got the message to you okay?”

“Yeah,” I said. “What do you know?”

“I don’t *know* anything; I’m just trying to add up some wild guesses. I don’t think you did it or you wouldn’t have called back here the other night. I’ve tried to sell that to the police, but they won’t buy. You’re their boy all the way.”

“There was something about a girl?”

“I’m coming to that. If you didn’t do it, it had to be somebody who was already up there. Right? So maybe an ex-con, somebody he’d sent up. Or a stool-pigeon he was riding a little too hard or something. But the chances are since it was in his apartment, it was a woman. You know what his reputation was with babes. You still with me?”

“Keep firing,” I said.

“All right. This will bring you up to date, but it’s not very promising to start with. Stedman was killed with a bone-handled hunting knife. His. He usually kept it in the desk of his living room to open letters with. No fingerprints, of course. It was one of those carved handles. No sign anybody else had been in the apartment that night. Except you. God knows you left plenty of signs. The Homicide boys say the living room looked like the two of you had been playing polo on bulldozers. But no babes. I mean, no cigarette butts with lipstick, no highball glasses, nothing. No prints except his. He came in around eight-thirty p.m. alone, and didn’t go out again, as far as anybody knows. Nobody seen going into his place afterward, except you. That was around ten, or a few minutes past Nobody came out after you did. That’s definite.

“But of course there’s a rear entrance. You know that;your apartment has the same layout. And here’s what I’m going on. He was in here about eight that night, just before he went home, and he bought a bottle of champagne from me. Stedman never drank champagne, so he was expecting company.”

I was growing excited. “Do you know if he opened it?”

“No. It was still in the freezer compartment of his refrig. That killed it, as far as the boys from Headquarters were concerned. But still they could have been just about to open it when you broke up the party. Or maybe she came in the back way while you and Stedman were racking each other up out in the living room.”

“Stedman knew dozens of girls,” I said. “You got anybody in particular in mind?”

“Yeah. A real wild guess. She’s a new one. He picked her up about ten days ago, right here in the bar. And all she was drinking was champagne cocktails.”

“Who is she?”

“That’s just it; I don’t know. All I know is she ought to be against the law. Stacked? Brother! But never mind. What I’m driving at is that I saw him pick her up, and I got the impression that was exactly what she came in for. Not just for anybody, but for Stedman. And believe me, this babe could do better; she’d already brushed off at least two good bets before he got there.”

“Did you ever see her again?”

“Once. Three or four days later I happened to be passing the Wakefield around eleven a.m. just as she came out the front entrance. I’m pretty sure she doesn’t live there, so Stedman must have scored. But that’s not what I want to tell you. The beautiful part of it is that when she came in the bar I remembered I’d seen her once before. This is not a babe you ever forget. If you’re interested in her, I may know where you can find her.”

“Where?” I asked.

“Look. I don’t know the number, but there’s a little hash-house and coffee shop on Denton Street, over near the ship channel. That’s a kind of an industrial area in there, warehouses, small factories, like that. This beanery is right across the street from the offices of the Comet Boat Company. You know, they make those plastic outboard hulls and runabouts. That boat of mine we used to fish in is one of them. Well, I went over to their office about a month ago with a friend of mine that’s trying to get a franchise to handle the line and we stopped in this diner for a cup of coffee. And that’s where I saw the girl. It was around ten a.m. and she came in with three other girls. Typical coffee-break safari, so she works in an office somewhere in that area. Maybe even for Comet, I don’t know.

“If you see her you can’t miss her. She’s a real Latin type, dark brown eyes with a lot of moxie in ‘em, shiny black hair. She wears it long. Real white teeth, about five-five, one of those smoky-looking babes that you’re never quite sure whether they’re going to freeze you dead or burst into flame. Twenty-five, twenty-six, like that. No wedding ring. The three rimes I saw her she was wearing those dangly earrings.”

“Thanks a million,” I said. “Anything else?”

“One more pipe dream, and this is really reaching for it. Stedman was on the Robbery Detail, you know. He had partner named Jack Purcell, a real cool cat. One of those smooth ones without a nerve in his body. Well, you were probably at sea when it happened, but Purcell committed suicide just about three weeks ago. No note. No reason, that anybody could ever find out.”

“It *was* suicide?”

“What else could they call it? He was alone in the house while his wife was at the movies. He was shot through the head with his own thirty-eight, which was lying beside his body with his fingerprints on it. It was a contact wound, as they call it.”

“Well, it happens,” I said.

“But very seldom to guys like Purcell. I realize it’s goofy, but I keep thinking there may be a connection somewhere. Just after it happened a friend of mine told me he thought Purcell might have been stepping out. Said he saw him once in a car with a real dish of a brunette.” There was a pause. “Be careful, Irish,” he said and hung up.

I stepped out of the booth. A car was coming along this side of the street. I stopped, waiting for it to go past before I crossed. Then, as it passed a street light, I saw it was a police cruiser. I turned and started walking slowly along the sidewalk with my back to the oncoming lights. It came abreast of me. Then it stopped. My back congealed with sudden fear.

“You looking for somebody out here?” a voice asked.

It was all right; they couldn’t see my face in the darkness. I fought to make my voice sound casual. “No. Just taking a walk, officer.”

“In the rain? Where do you live?”

Before I could answer, a beam of light splashed full in my face. I tried to turn away, but it was too late. “Hey!” the voice barked. “Come back here!”

I heard the car door slam behind me, and running footsteps. The one still in the car was. trying to hit me with the spotlight. “Stop, Foley! We’ll shoot.”

I’d never make it to the corner alive. And if I did, the other one was following me in the car. I saw an opening between two concessions on my right, and shot into it. The rear of the buildings were in deep shadow, but I could make out the dark tracery of the Ferris wheel and some of the other rides. I cut sharply to the left, ran another fifty feet, and froze against the wall. Just beyond me was another corner. I inched quietly around it just as he shot into the open at the rear of the concessions, swinging the beam of the flashlight.

“Joe!” he yelled. “Drive on around and cover the street in back so he can’t get to the next block. And call in.”

The car went ahead and turned the corner. The one who was afoot had run-on back and was throwing the beam of his flashlight in wide arcs around the Ferris wheel. I slipped quietly along the narrow passage between two small buildings, and peered out into the beach boulevard. The Oldsmobile was gone. She’d managed to get away while they were occupied with me, and they probably hadn’t even noticed her. There was only one car in sight, some two blocks away. I shot across the street and over the edge of the far sidewalk. I landed on the sand, lost my balance, and fell. I was near one of the amusement piers, and the long expanse of beach stretched ahead of me, black and deserted in the rain. I got up and ran. I could hear sirens wailing behind me as police cars began pouring into the area. I ran until my side hurt and breathing was an agony.

I sat down at last with my back against the concrete of the seawall. Rain drummed on the brim of my hat. Now they knew I was back in Sanport. And I’d lost Suzy. I didn’t know her address or her phone number, and even if I could find another outside phone booth and look it up in the book, I couldn’t call her. I had a hundred and seventy dollars in my pocket, but I didn’t have a dime.

Five

My teeth began to chatter as water penetrated my clothes. I had to find some place to get out of the rain, and unless I discovered a hiding place before daybreak they'd have me. Every cop in town was alerted by now, and my description would be broadcast over the radio. With this black eye and the stubble of ginger-colored beard to give me away, I couldn't move a foot without being recognized.

How about a hotel, a skid-row flophouse? No. That would be suicidal. I still had a key to my own apartment in the Wakefield, but they'd have that covered front and rear. Maybe I could find my way to the railroad yards again and catch another freight. I fought down an impulse to cry out or laugh. I must be going crazy. That would put me right back where I'd started forty-eight hours ago. I was going around and around in an endless circle in a nightmare. I was a mechanical rabbit running forever in front of a pack of hounds along a dark racetrack in a rain that had been going on since the beginning of time. I thought of the bridge of the *Dancy*, and hot coffee, and my own room and the rows of books, and the poker games in the steam-heated messroom.

I tore my mind away from the picture, and then I was thinking of Suzy's apartment, and of warmth and safety, and of Suzy herself. I swore wearily. Jesus, I'd been so near. Then I sprang up. What the hell was the matter with me? I could still get there. All I had to do was find another telephone booth and look up her address. I didn't have to call her. The whole night was ahead of me—it couldn't be much after eight—and I could-make it on foot. I wouldn't be able to ask directions, but I knew the city fairly well, and the chances were it would be on a street I'd recognize. And if it weren't, maybe the directory would have a map in it. I'd forgotten, but some of them did.

The first thing to do was get clear of this area—get miles away. They'd be searching it block by block. I walked westward along the beach. Now and then a car went past on the roadway to the right and above me. I stayed

out of the range of their headlights. After a long time I crossed the road and struck inland. I found a shell-surfaced country road following a sluggish creek. Rain kept falling. The topcoat was soaked now and heavy. I was seized with uncontrollable fits of shaking that lasted for minutes at a time. Whenever I saw a car coming, I dived off the road and hid.

Far off to the left I could see beacons flashing. That would be the International Airport. Then there were more lights up ahead. I was approaching the highway that came into Sanport from the west, from the direction of Carlisle. I began to pass more houses, and then I was in a suburban housing development. Few cars were moving, and there were no pedestrians. Some of the houses were dark. That seemed strange, until I had to pass another unavoidable street light and looked at my watch. It was eleven thirty-five. I'd been walking for at least three hours. In another seven, or a little more, it would be daybreak. I wondered if I could keep going that long, or if I could even get to her place in that length of time. It might be clear across town, ten or twelve miles from here. I saw a police car up ahead, and ducked down a shadowy side street. A dog barked at me. My teeth chattered again, and I clenched my jaws to stop them. I turned again, still going toward the highway. I had to find a telephone booth, and there wouldn't be one in this area.

Then I located one, in the edge of a suburban shopping center. A service station on the corner was closed, with only a single bulb burning in back of the glass front wall of the office, and around at the side of it was a booth standing invitingly open. The streets were deserted except for a few cars near the movie house still open down in the next block. I took another quick look around and crossed to the station driveway. When I stepped inside the booth and closed the door, its light came on. I felt as if I were standing naked on a large stage before an audience of thousands. I grabbed for the directory, dangling from its chain, and fumbled through it with hands that shook uncontrollably. Water ran off my hat onto the pages.

Parker . . . Parkhurst . . . Patterson . . .

Patton . . . Here we were.

Patton, Robert . . . Patton, R.H . . . Patton, Stewart . . . Patton, Stephen R. . . . Patton, Victor E. . . . There was no Suzy Patton listed.

Of course there was. There had to be! I ran a trembling finger down the column again. I shook my head. Then, for some insane reason I couldn't

fathom, I was counting them. There were thirty-seven Pattons, but there was no Suzy Patton, and there wasn't even an S. Patton or an S. Anything Patton. I dropped the phone book and rubbed a hand harshly across my face.

Suzy Patton was a pen name, or she had an unlisted number. In a city of six hundred thousand— I started to laugh. My head felt queer. I chopped off the laugh and pushed out of the booth, and when the rain hit me in the face my mind cleared a little and I was only freezing cold and chattering. I went on walking. There was nothing else to do. If I stopped, I'd probably freeze. Well, at daybreak they'd pick me up and I'd be in a nice warm interrogation room with a white light in my face and then just before I cracked and went insane I could sign a statement and go to sleep.

I stopped suddenly. Maybe there was still a chance, if f could only call Red. I looked around, trying to orient myself and snap my mind out of its numbness. I was in a quiet residential district under dark and weeping trees. I leaned against the trunk of one and forced myself to try to think. What would she have done? Gone home, obviously, knowing there was no chance she could ever find me again. And she'd realize I couldn't find her, since she wasn't in the book. Red was the only person we both knew, the only common contact. Maybe she had called him.

No, of course she wouldn't. After that narrow escape back there at the Playland she'd probably had enough, and didn't care if she never saw me again. She was just lucky she'd got away herself. Did I think she'd be crazy enough to give Red an address, when she didn't know him and had no guarantee at all she could trust him? How would she know he wouldn't give it to the police? The whole idea was absurd. But it persisted. It was the only thing I had left, and I couldn't force myself to let it go.

But how was I going to call him? I didn't have a dime. The idea of having one hundred and seventy dollars but not having a dime again struck me as one of the great jokes of the year, and I laughed. It occurred to me I was becoming light-headed. I pushed myself off the tree and went on. It was five or six blocks further on that I saw the small neighborhood bar. It was across the street, with a neon cocktail glass above the bar and a sign that said, TERRY MAC'S. There were three cars parked in front of it, and on either side were stores that were closed. I stepped back into a doorway and looked at it hungrily. The slip of paper she'd given me was still in the

pocket of the topcoat. I took it out and studied it in the dim light, memorizing the number. Then I looked back at the bar.

No, it would be insane. Then I noticed an odd thing. The rain had started to bounce. It fell on the shiny black pavement and leaped into the air like pellets of tiny white shot. It had turned to sleet. That settled it. I was soaked all the way to the skin and I'd freeze to death before morning if I didn't get inside somewhere. A long-shot chance was better than none at all. I pulled the coat collar tighter about my face, yanked down the brim of the hat, and crossed the street.

It was dim and smoky inside. A man and a girl were sitting on stools about halfway down the bar, and beyond them was a man alone. The bartender was an Irish-looking kid in his early twenties with blue-black hair and unbelievably white teeth. They all looked up as I came in, stared briefly, and stopped talking. At the rear was a jukebox, and beside it a phone booth.

"Shot of bourbon, straight," I said. "And give me the change in dimes." I put a dollar on the bar. The three customers glanced at each other and then became elaborately absorbed in their drinks as if they'd never seen drinks before. "Yes, sir," the bartender said heartily, avoiding my eyes. He put the drink and the change on the bar. I grabbed up the dimes, threw the whisky into the back of my mouth with one sweep of my hand, and was already moving toward the phone booth by the time it could burn its way down my frozen throat and explode.

I slammed the door, fumbled a dime into the slot and dialed with a finger like a dead piece of wood. The shakes seized me again, and I could hear water running out of my clothes onto the floor. *Christ, wouldn't they ever answer?* I shifted a little and shot a glance toward the front of the bar. So far, nobody had moved.

"Sidelines Bar." It was a girl's voice this time.

"Red Lanigan," I said, fighting the chattering of my teeth.

The girl went away. I waited, feeling almost drunk on the single shot of whisky. My head swam. Then somebody was picking up the receiver. "Lanigan speaking."

"Listen, Red—"

He chuckled indulgently. "Look, you happy meat-head. If you have to get drunk, at least you could do it here." I heard him kick the door shut.

“Jesus, I’m glad you could get to a phone. Listen, she called—”

“What did she say?” I cut in.

“A-H.”

“What?”

“That’s all. She said to tell you, ‘A-H.’ A as in Able, H as in Happy. I hope to God you know what it means. I don’t.”

“Thanks,” I said. I hung up. Oh, you beautiful, blonde, brainy girl. I grabbed for the directory, and as I nipped it open I shot another glance at the bar. It was already too late. The Irish bartender was pretending to wash out some glasses in the sink with the near hand while he held the receiver of the bar phone with the other. He was nodding his head. I saw him turn a little and shoot a glance toward the booth.

I stepped out and started toward the door. The three customers returned to studying the strange drinks they’d never seen before. Silence fell. The bartender had stopped talking into the phone and was holding it as if he couldn’t make up his mind what he wanted to do with it. I wondered if he had already given them the address. An illogical rage seized me. I was tired of being the mechanical rabbit all the time. It wasn’t fair. I stopped, took the receiver out of his hand, picked up the base of the instrument, and yanked. The cord tore apart in the junction box under the bar.

“Are you Terry Mac?” I asked. My head felt as if it were going to float out the door without me.

He stared at me, white-faced, too startled to speak.

”Shove it, you shanty-Irish pig,” I said, and dropped the phone, receiver and all, into the sink. The broken end of the cord still dangled over the edge. It didn’t look neat at all so I coiled it very carefully, and shoved it down into the water along with the rest of the instrument. I turned and walked out without looking back.

Sleet pattered on my hat brim and tapped on my face. I broke into a run, and just before I turned the corner I looked over my shoulder. The bartender and one of the men were standing in the doorway to see which way I went. By the time I’d run another block I heard the sirens.

I went on, feeling my feet lift and swing and pound against the concrete until every breath was agony. I turned and turned again and lost all sense of direction. I saw headlights approaching down an intersecting street. The car started to turn toward me, and just before the headlights swept over me I

dived sideways into an oleander hedge. I fell through it, and lay in a puddle of water with the sleet tapping restfully on my hat and the side of my face. My arm was against something metallic and uncomfortable. I reached over and felt it with my other hand. It was a lawn sprinkler. I thought drowsily it would be a shame if they turned it on.

More cars went up the street, swinging spotlights. I didn't know how long I lay there. After awhile I got my breath back, and moved a little, fighting the drowsiness. I wanted to go to sleep, but something made me get up to my hands and knees. It was quiet now. No cars had gone by for a long time. I climbed through the hedge and started walking. After a few blocks my teeth started chattering again. I thought that was a good sign; I didn't believe your teeth chattered when you were freezing. Twice more I had to duck into yards to avoid the lights of cars. I was doing everything mechanically now, and for long periods I would forget what I was looking for. *Phone booth*, I told myself. Remember that. *Phone booth.*

I was standing under a street light. I looked at my watch. It said ten minutes of five. I slapped myself on the face and looked again. It must be stopped, or I was drunk. It couldn't be that late. Lousy watch, always stopping. I looked across the street and realized I was staring at a big green clock in the window of a filling station, and that it said ten minutes of five. And in the shadows beside the station was a phone booth. I focused on it, hard, and managed to break into a run.

A for Able, H for Happy. I got the directory open somehow and fumbled through it with nerveless fingers. Patton . . .

Patton, Alvis W. . . .

Patton, A. H. . . . I repeated the number, prodded the dime into the slot, and dialed.

She answered almost immediately. "Yes?" she said eagerly.

"I'm—" I said. "I'm—uh—"

She sighed. "God, I've been waiting all night. He said he gave you the message hours ago. Where are you?"

"I don't know," I said. "Wait." I dropped the receiver and stepped out of the booth to look up at the sign on the edge of the cantilever roof above the driveway BARRETT'S SHELL SERVICE, it said.

I repeated it.

“All right,” she said quickly. “I’ll have to look it up, so I don’t know how far away it is. It may take five minutes or thirty. Stay right there, or as near as you can and still be out of sight. I’ll come by on that side of the street with my right-hand turn signal blinking. If everything is clear, come out and get in. If not, I’ll go around six or eight blocks and try again. All right?”

“Y-yes,” I said. I hung up. I went around behind the station in the deep shadows and leaned against the wall. My skin hurt all over the way I imagined it did in spots when you had gout. I couldn’t really be freezing, I thought; you never hurt then. Time went by. I began to dream I was on the bridge of the *Dancy* off Hatteras in a snowstorm. No, that couldn’t be right. I was never wet on the bridge. We had oilskins. I heard a car coming. I went to the corner and peered up the street. The car’s turn signal was blinking. I ran out. She stopped abruptly, and I got in. I doubled over, holding my arms, shaking violently and trying to keep from touching the wet clothes anywhere with my skin.

She drove fast. “Only a few minutes, Irish,” she said. I thought numbly she must have got that from Red. He always called me Irish.

I didn’t know how much later it was we were going down a ramp into a garage. It was shadowy, like a big cavern. Then she was helping me out. I went up the ramp after her, trying to walk without touching my clothes. We went past some grass where the sleet was bouncing, and then she was fitting a key into a large glass door. There was a small foyer inside with a potted palm and two elevators. It was very quiet. One of the elevators was standing open. We got in and she pressed a button. When we got out, she took off the dark coat she was wearing, and mopped the water off the bare floor of the car. It didn’t show very much on the carpet in the corridors. We met no one. Then she was unlocking another door.

I had a confused impression of a large room with thousands of books and a gray rug and colored draperies, and then she was leading me into another room. There were more curtains, and a double bed, a king-sized double bed, and beyond it was the door to the bathroom. Even the bathroom was large. She led me into it. There was a glass-doored stall shower. She reached in and turned on the taps. I went on shaking. I tried to say something. She shook her head at me and pushed me into the shower. “Sit down,” she said.

I sat down with the hot water pouring over my head and shoulders. She took off my shoes. “Now can you stand?” she asked. I got to my feet. The water felt as if it were boiling, but I went right on shaking. She peeled off the topcoat and dropped it to the floor. Then the coat. I tried to unbutton the shirt, but she caught both sides of it and tore at it, spraying the buttons off. In a moment I was naked, standing on the wet clothes while steamy water sluiced down over me. “I’ll be back,” she said, and closed the sliding door.

My skin was dead white and drawn up in a thousand whorls and wrinkles like the pictures of fingerprints, and my teeth went right on chattering. The door slid back and she was holding a glass half full of whisky. I drank it.

“All right,” she said. “Out you come. If you collapse before you get in bed I’ll never be able to lift you.”

She handed me a towel and took one herself. It felt as if we were tearing my skin off. She led me into the bedroom. The bed was turned down. She pushed me into it and covered me. She went out and came back almost immediately with another drink. She held it to my lips. My teeth beat like castanets against the glass, but I managed to swallow the whisky.

“Poor Irish,” she said. She clicked off the light, leaving only the faint illumination from the doorway to the living room. Then I saw she was undressing. She tossed the sweater, skirt, and slip across a chair, and sat down to remove her stockings. The room began to swim in big circles. She tossed the last garment onto the chair and slid in beside me.

“This may help,” she said. She gathered my head against her breasts, and a long smooth thigh slid up and over my leg and entwined with it as she held me pressed to her in every place we could touch. “It’s just a chill. It’ll go away.”

I struggled against the blackness that was trying to engulf me.

“Easy, Irish,” she said soothingly. “Just go to sleep.”

The walls of the room swam by again. I tried to get my arms round her, but I went on shaking.

“You can’t,” she said gently. “You know you can’t.”

She was right. I couldn’t. I made one more futile grab at the edge of the precipice and then fell, and went on falling through darkness.

Six

It was like waking up in another world. I sat up and looked around, almost as stupidly as if I had a hangover. In spite of the oversized bed, it was a very feminine room. Some light sifted in through the pale rose curtains that covered the wall at my left. The rug was a soft ivory in color, and the sliding doors of the clothes closet were full-length mirrors. The bed itself had a satin-covered headboard, a gold spread folded down at the foot of it, and a Dacron comforter. At either side were small night tables that held matching rose-shaded lamps with ebony bases. On the one at my left there was a white telephone, and tossed carelessly across it a black eyeshade of nylon or silk with an elastic band. It was warm and very quiet except for the faint and occasional sounds of traffic somewhere below. Across from me, by the dressing table with its wing mirrors and clutter of jars and bottles, was the door to the next room. It was closed..

It opened in a few minutes, and she peered in. When she saw I was awake, she smiled, and came on in. She was wearing black Capri pants and a white shirt, and she was barefoot. The light hair was carelessly tousled, and she looked as big and vital as a Viking's dream.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"Rum-dum," I said. "As if I had a hangover."

"You probably have. I think I poured a pint of whisky into you."

"I really went out, didn't I?"

"You're lucky you're not dead," she said. "No food for four days except two cans of corned beef, and then nine hours soaked to the skin in freezing weather." She sat on the side of the bed and put her hand on my forehead. "Any fever?"

"I don't think so," I said. "Where am I?"

"Seventh floor of the Lancaster Apartments, 2110 Beechwood Drive. Apartment 703. It's four-thirty p.m. Friday, and you've been asleep for

eleven hours. You're safe here. Nobody saw you come in, and we can't be heard through the walls."

"Is there any chance they saw you last night?" I asked.

She shook her head. "They were too intent on you. And even if they did, they couldn't have got my license number. I didn't turn my lights on until I was a block away. According to the morning papers, they don't believe now you ever left town at all."

"What does A.H. stand for?"

"Amelia Holly Patton. It's my real name, but nobody knows it except for a few close friends, so it's as good as having an unlisted number."

"That was a smart trick," I said.

"It was the only way I could think of to tell you without telling him. I was pretty sure if you'd tried to find me in the book you'd catch on."

I caught her shoulders and pulled her down toward me.

"Just a minute, you Irish hedge-hog," she said. "The way you scratched me with that beard—"

"Where?" I asked.

There was cynical amusement in the gray eyes just above mine. "You know damned well where. After you collapsed with your head on my breast, I went on holding you for an hour before you quit shaking."

"That was a wonderful system you had for thawing me out."

"Not exactly original," she said. "But effective. However, you're not cold now." "That's what I mean," I said.

"You need rest. And food. You should be in a hospital—"

I pulled her head down and kissed her. Her mouth was warm and soft against mine, and then eager, and finally urgent. I tried to unbutton the shirt, but she was lying across my chest. She tightened her arms around my neck. It was like being devoured. Then she turned a little and began tearing at the buttons of the shirt herself. She slid out of it and tossed it on the floor. She wore no bra.

"See?" she said.

"I'm sorry."

"I'll bet you are."

"I mean I'm sorry I was asleep. Does it hurt?"

She smiled. "Not particularly. I'm just making a big thing of it, looking for sympathy."

“I don’t know about sympathy, but if you could use some admiration—”

“I guess the Irish are hard to kill,” she said.

I took her in my arms and kissed her again. She made an eager little sound in her throat, and when I began trying to find the zipper of the other garment she was wearing she took my hand in hers and showed me which side it was on.

* * *

She went out into the other room. I heard music come up somewhere in the background, and then she appeared in the doorway with a pack of cigarettes. She lighted one and put it between my fingers.

“Don’t let go of it all at once,” I said. “Wait’ll I brace myself.”

She smiled. “Poor Irish. Life is just one beating after another.”

I studied the sensation of having melted and wondered if I’d ever again have strength enough to move. I tried to raise my head, and dizziness attacked me. She lighted a cigarette for herself and stood looking down at me. She had nothing on at all, but appeared completely unconcerned about it. I didn’t believe I had ever seen as much statuesque and unflawed blondeness collected in one area before.

“You’re lovely,” I said. “How tall are you?”

“Five-ten,” she replied. “Isn’t it awful?”

“No. Magnificent is the word I was reaching for.”

She lay down beside me. “Blarney.”

“No. I’m too weak to lie about anything. But why are you helping me this way?”

“Why do you keep harping on that?” she asked. “I told you once. You interest me.”

“That doesn’t seem like much of a reason.”

“It’s relative,” she said. “I knew an old man once who sat on a bench in front of a library for eight months trying to figure out why pigeons bob their heads when they walk.”

“Did he ever find out?” I asked.”No. But it kept him from screaming.”

“Bunk,” I said. “A girl with everything? Looks, build, vitality, brains—”

“Did you ever read a volume of first chapters? But never mind; I told you there was no way to explain it to a non-writer, so let’s get back to you

for a sort of preliminary brainstorming session. Do you have any money?”

“About one hundred and seventy dollars.”

“That’s all?”

“That’s all I’ll ever get my hands on. There may be some in the checking account, and there’s some savings and a few shares of Southlands Oil Company stock that all add up to about six thousand, but there’s no way I can get it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she replied. “I could lend you money, but that’s not the big problem, anyway. If you’re to escape for good, it’s a matter of changing your whole identity and way of life. Naturally, you can never go to sea again.”

“It won’t work,” I said. “Going to sea is the only thing I like or know how to do. I’d be like a fish with feathers, trying to live ashore. That’s what my wife and I fought about all the time.”

“All right, let’s drop that for the moment and study another possibility. I don’t think you killed Stedman, so maybe we could find out who did. What did Lanigan have to say?”

I told her.

“Hmmm,” she said thoughtfully. She blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling and studied it. “That has a definitely intriguing ring. Especially the coincidence about Stedman’s partner. What was his name again?”

“Purcell,” I said. “Jack Purcell.”

She nodded. “I’m pretty sure I remember reading about it. And that girl sounds interesting.”

“There are probably several thousand good-looking brunettes in a city this size,” I said. “And maybe she didn’t have anything to do with it anyway.”

“You never find out why pigeons bob their heads by dismissing it as an optical illusion. The thing to do is try to find her. But you can’t even think of going out of here until that black eye fades.” She raised herself on an elbow and looked at my face with critical appraisal. I studied the interesting curves this gave her breasts and put my hand under one.

She smiled and shook her head. “The forever undefeated, or at least hopeful. But about that eye—it’ll probably be another three days, at least. They have some very sharp descriptions of you, and the red hair is bad

enough, along with your height, but those bruises are like carrying a sign with your name on it."

"I'm going to have to do something about clothes."

"That's all taken care of," she said. "Except I'll have to buy you another hat and topcoat. The ones you had on last night are in the descriptions now. Let's see—the coat was tweed, so I'll get you a tan gabardine—"

"Where did you get the others?"

"Courtesy of my ex-husband. Or maybe I should say the more recent of my two ex-husbands. When he moved out, he left a trunk of his personal effects in the storeroom of the apartment house and never has sent for it. I went down yesterday and broke into it to see what I could find, since he's about your size. There were two suits, both conservative, dark gray flannel, and a lot of shirts and other things. And I brought up some pajamas and a flannel robe for you to wear around the apartment. They're in the closet."

She got up and went into the bath. I could hear her in the tub. After awhile she came out wearing a panty girdle and bra and sat down at the dressing table to put on her stockings.

"There's a safety razor in the cabinet," she said.

"Thanks," I replied. I sat up on the side of the bed. Weakness and vertigo hit me and I almost fell over. I managed to prop myself upright, and watched her pull the nylon up a smooth and rounded thigh and clip it to the little tabs on the girdle. "You're an exciting girl."

She rotated the ankle and tugged it straight. "Regroup," she said. "You've had all the excitement you can take."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Shopping," she said. "We've got to get some food in you before you collapse. And I have to go to the library. I'll be back in about an hour."

She went to the clothes closet and put on a slip and a knitted dress. Sitting at the dressing table, again, she slipped on her shoes and applied some lipstick. "Tell me about your wife," she said, glancing at me in the mirror. Weren't you in love with her?"

"Sure," I said. "But we wore it out fighting. She wanted me to quit the ship and get some kind of job ashore. But hell, there's nothing I could do ashore that would pay anything like the same money. I couldn't stand it, anyway."

"What was she like?"

“Nice, but hot-tempered. A redhead with one of those complexions you can almost see through. She’s a couple of years older than I am. A nightclub singer. Not a very good one, I guess, and when I met her she wasn’t singing in very good clubs, but she hated to give it up. She was married once before.”

She frowned thoughtfully, checking the lipstick. “If it was all over and you were about to break up anyway, why did you want to fight Stedman? That was childish.”

“I know, I know. It was stupid. But I just didn’t like the smug bastard.”

She clucked chidingly. *“De mortuis—”*

“What’s that?”

“The smug bastard’s dead. Call him something else.”

“All right.”

She removed a grayish fur coat from the closet and draped it across her shoulders. “Don’t get absent-minded and answer the phone if it rings. Or the buzzer downstairs.” She went out.

I made it to the bathroom on legs like overcooked spaghetti and had a shower. I found the safety razor, put in a new blade, and shaved. My face was gaunt, as if I’d lost ten pounds in the past four days. The puffy place on my jaw was better now and was hardly noticeable, but the eye was still discolored even though some of the swelling was gone. I put on the pajamas and robe she’d told me about and went out in the living room.

It was a large room, carpeted in gray, with a long picture window on the left. The rose-colored curtains were closed, but they let in a little light, and when I parted them slightly and looked out I saw the building faced a park. The weather had turned clear now, but it was sunset, and the bare trees looked cold. I turned away and switched on a light.

There was a screened fireplace of Roman brick beside the window, and the whole wall next to the bedroom was lined with books. Opposite the window, near the front door, was a long blond console that appeared to be a hi-fi system, and three watercolors in heavy, bleached wood frames. The sofa and chairs were lightweight and modern-

There were two doors at the far end of the room. I went over and looked in the one on the left. It was a small study, lined solidly with books except for one window that was covered with dark green drapes. There was a desk that held a covered typewriter. A shaded lamp was suspended above it.

The other door led into a small dining room, and just beyond it was a long, rather narrow kitchen. I went in and switched on the light, feeling faint with hunger. The only thing edible in the refrigerator was a piece of cheese and half a bottle of milk. I ate a slice of the cheese and drank a glass of milk. Then I ransacked the cupboards. I found some vermouth and gin and an unopened can of salted peanuts. Locating a pitcher, I broke out some ice cubes, mixed a batch of Martinis, poured one, and put the rest in the refrigerator. Opening the can of peanuts, I carried them out into the living room.

Something dropped on the rug outside the door. It sounded like a newspaper. I put down the Martini and peanuts and listened for a moment. Then I peered out. The corridor was empty, and the evening paper was lying just under my feet. I snatched it up and closed the door. Switching on a reading light at the end of the sofa, I took a sip of the Martini and spread it open. I was across two columns of the front page.

SEAMAN CONTINUES
TO ELUDE DRAGNET

> “Feb. 21 . . . Russell Foley, local seaman sought in connection with the slaying last Tuesday of police detective Charles L. Stedman, was still at large this afternoon in spite of an intensive search now going into its third day. Police are convinced he is still in the city, and all bus and railway terminals and the airport are being closely watched . . .”

The story went on with an account of the two times I’d been seen last night. The description was chillingly accurate, right down to the black eye. My apartment was being watched. If I stepped outside the next few days they’d have me within an hour. They were making a block by block search of all cheap hotels and flophouses. They knew I’d holed up somewhere or I’d have frozen to death last night. The police commissioner and Chief of Police were promising action. If they got their hands on me it was. going to be rough; I was a cop killer, and I’d been making a city’s whole police force look silly for four days.

On the second page was a rehash of the fight and of the arrival of the police to find Stedman dead with the hunting knife in his throat. It was

substantially the same as I'd pieced it together from Red's account and that on the radio, except that the patrolmen hadn't forced the door. The manager had let them in. There was no mention of anyone else at all. I was it. All they had to do was get their hands on me and the whole thing was solved. And all that was standing between me and them at the moment was a girl who was interested in me because she was bored.

Seven

The Martini made me dizzy and gave everything a gauzy effect. I didn't dare pour another; as weak and empty as I was, two would drop me on the floor. She came back in a little over an hour, carrying a large bag of groceries and looking excited. I tried to help her but she shook her head. We went out in the kitchen and unpacked the bag. It held the biggest double sirloin I had ever seen and some frozen french-fried potatoes and a half-gallon carton of milk among other things.

"I've got something to tell you," she said, "but first we start this food. Put my coat away, will you, Irish?"

I took it into the bedroom and hung it in the closet. When I returned she was putting the frozen potatoes in the oven and turning on the broiler. She broke out a box of frozen broccoli and put that on, then started some coffee. I leaned against the refrigerator and watched her. In the high heels she was nearly as tall as I was, and the way she dominated and sculptured a knit dress was something to see.

"I'm no cook," she said, "but I do think we have to let that steak sit awhile at room temperature."

"Here," I said. I opened the refrigerator and poured her a Martini. "Tell me this news you've got."

"Aren't you having one?" she asked.

"I already have. One more and you'll have to shoot that steak into my arm."

We went into the living room. She kicked her shoes off and put her feet up on a hassock. The hardboiled gray eyes were alight with interest. "It's about Purcell," she said. "He committed suicide. But he couldn't have."

"That's what you went to the library for?"

She nodded. "I've been going through the back files of the papers. Then I called a friend of mine on the *Express*. He's on the police beat and knew Purcell. Hand me my purse, will you, Irish?"

I got it for her. She took out a small notebook.

“Here we are,” she said. “The official verdict was suicide, but the police have never been quite satisfied with it. Lanigan summed it up pretty well when he said he was a real cool cat. He was tough, in a civilized sort of way, one of the few college-educated men on the force, strictly on the make, but highly competent. He was a detective First Grade and was a cinch to make Sergeant the next time around. He’d been married for three years to a very nice girl. Good health and no difficult financial troubles that anybody knew anything about. Nothing crooked on his record. In his ten years on the force he’d had to kill two men, but I suppose that’s the risk you take in being a police officer. Doesn’t seem likely they would have bothered him. They were both men with long records, and dangerous, and in both cases he was exonerated.”

She paused and took a sip of the Martini. “Now, the actual suicide. He lived in a housing development called Bellehaven, about six miles north of town—”

“I know where it is,” I said. “Two- and three-bedroom houses, fifteen thousand dollars and up.”

She nodded. “Then you know where the big shopping center is. I was just out there; that’s where I bought the steak. Purcell’s address was 2531 Winston Drive. That’s the last street in the subdivision, and it parallels the edge of the shopping center. In fact, part of the supermarket parking area is directly behind the row of houses in that block.”

“Then you could park in the supermarket lot and go right into the back yard?”

She shook her head. “Not easily. The whole area is lighted. And all the back yards are enclosed with six-foot basket-weave fences covered with Pyracantha. There are gates, but they have latches that can be secured from inside. And Purcell’s was padlocked. You could climb the fences, of course, but in the early evening somebody in the parking lot would be almost certain to see you.

“It happened on the night of January twenty-eighth, a little over three weeks ago. Mrs. Purcell went to a movie with the wife of a next-door neighbor. She often did; Purcell cared nothing for movies. She left around eight and there was never any doubt Purcell was alive afterward. The neighbor came over about the same time and he and Purcell had a beer and

watched a fight on television until a little after nine. And after he left, about nine-thirty, Purcell's boss, Lt. Shriver of the Robbery Detail, called him about something. He said Purcell sounded perfectly normal over the phone. And as nearly as they could tell afterward, that was only forty-five minutes before he killed himself. Neighbors on both sides heard the shot, and they placed it at approximately ten-fifteen. At the time they thought it was a car backfiring.

"The picture was a double feature, so it was ten after twelve when Mrs. Purcell returned home. She put the car in the garage, and the two women said goodnight. The neighbor woman had hardly got inside when she heard Mrs. Purcell scream and then run out of the house.

"The police were there within minutes. Purcell was slumped over his desk in the living room, shot through the temple with his own thirty-eight. The shoulder holster was where he always left it when he came home, hanging on a hook in the hall closet. The gun was lying on the rug beside his chair. They could get only partial prints off it, but they were all his. There was no sign of a struggle at all, and nothing to indicate anybody else had been there. The gate to the backyard was locked, and nobody in the block had seen anyone come or go from the front of the house. It couldn't have been an accident, because all his gun-cleaning equipment was put away in the kitchen. There was no note, but on the desk just under his face was a single sheet of white paper and a ballpoint pen, as if he'd started to write one and then changed his mind."

It was baffling. "What do you think?" I asked.

"That he was murdered."

"Why?"

"Several reasons—one of which you don't know yet. In the first place, the back gate's being padlocked didn't mean anything. It could have been locked after he was killed. Suppose he'd stayed home because he was expecting a visitor—a woman? He'd have left it open for her."

"But how would she leave afterward?"

"Take her chances and go right out the front. All she had to do was walk half a block, turn right at the next street, and she'd be back in the parking lot. After eleven p.m., the streets in those housing developments are pretty quiet."

"All right. What else?"

“There’s no such thing as a spur-of-the-moment suicide. When a man kills himself, whatever’s behind it has been feeding on him considerably longer than forty-five minutes. A single man might keep it hidden, but Purcell was married, and his wife said there’d been nothing unusual in his behavior.”

“Yes, but damn it, we’re still just talking about Purcell. There’s no connection with Stedman except that they were partners on the Robbery Detail.”

She gestured with the cigarette. “And that they’re both dead. Don’t forget that. However, there’s one more thing they had in common—the one you haven’t heard yet. Remember, I said Purcell had killed two men in line of duty?”

“Yes?”

“One of them was actually killed by Purcell *and* Stedman. On the twenty-second of December. See how your coincidence is stretching? In a little over a month Purcell commits suicide, and in less than three weeks after that Stedman is murdered.”

I stared at her. “Yes—but, look. The police must have checked into it. A coincidence as obvious as that.”

She nodded. “To some extent, yes. But remember, it takes at least two of anything to make a coincidence, and *you* killed Stedman. When you accept that, it falls apart.”

I got up and walked across the room and back. “But, good God, they must have made *some* effort to check out any other angles.”

“They did,” she replied. “Except that there don’t appear to be any. The man Stedman and Purcell killed was just another vicious hoodlum. His name was Danny Bullard, and he had a record going back ten years, with two convictions for armed robbery. He pulled a gun on. them when they tried to pick him up for questioning about a liquor store holdup. They had to shoot.”

“He have any close relatives?”

She shook her head. “There was an older brother, a waterfront goon named Ryan Bullard, but nobody’s seen him in years. He was tried and acquitted of killing a seaman during a strike, and after it was over he disappeared.”

I lighted a cigarette. “How about a girl friend?”

“Now you’re getting warmer. It has to be a girl. Assuming for the moment they were both murdered, the circumstances in both cases appear to be the same—the murderer could have been there clandestinely and by invitation. That spells only one thing, obviously. The only trouble is there doesn’t seem to be any girl.”

“Except the one Red told me about,” I said. “I’ve got to locate her.”

She nodded. “Yes. I don’t know what we’re going to prove if we do find her, but we’ve got nowhere else to start. However, you can’t risk going out of here until Monday, at least.”

* * *

We cooked the steak. I could feel strength flowing back into me with the food. We listened to the hi-fi and caught a news broadcast on the radio. They were still taking the city apart, block by block, looking for me. After awhile we went to bed. If the heroines of all Suzy’s novels were sexy, I thought, they came by it honestly. She was talented and passionate and an absolute delight, but somehow even after she cried out in ecstasy and collapsed you felt the desperate unhappiness or boredom that was goading her was still there and it hadn’t done her any good at all. I awoke during the night and she was gone. Switching on the light, I looked at my watch. It was shortly after three p.m.

The door to the living room was ajar. I slipped on the bottom of the pajamas and went out. All the lights were on and she was sitting on the floor in the middle of the living room tossing cards into a silver bowl about ten feet away. She had on the black Capri pants, but was naked from the waist up except for the black silk eyeshade that was the only thing she ever wore in bed. It was pushed up over her forehead, and looked almost startling against the silvery blonde hair and fair skin. She was smoking a long black Mexican or Cuban cigarette, and beside her on the rug was a bottle of vodka and a glass. She was plastered.

She looked at me, glassy-eyed. “‘Smatter, Irish? Can’t you sleep?”

“No,” I said. I sat on the floor near her.

She sailed another card toward the bowl. It missed. She said a word I’d have bet she didn’t even know.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

”Matter?” She regarded me owlishly, and poured some more vodka. “Nothing at all.” She held out the bottle to me. “Have some of the opium of the futile, friend, and let’s revel in the pleasures of the flesh.” She paused, hiccupped, and solemnly appraised her naked torso and the swelling, dark-nippled breasts. “And speaking of flesh, did you ever see so much of it to revel in? One hundred and sixty pounds of futility—”

“Don’t you think you’ve had enough?”

She paid no attention. “No vodka? Then Benzedrine? Marijuana? Sex, anybody?”

She swayed. I caught her and somehow managed to get her in my arms and stand up. Carrying her into the other room, I put her on the bed and covered her. “Save six for pallbearers,” she said, and passed out cold. I stood looking down at her. It was a rotten shame, I thought.

In the morning when I awoke it was after nine and she was up and already dressed to go out. She was at the dressing table putting on her lipstick, and when she saw in the mirror that I was awake she turned and smiled, apparently without a trace of a hangover, as handsomely blonde and clear-eyed as ever.

She came over and sat on the side of the bed. “Sorry about last night.”

“It’s all right,” I said. “I wish there was something I could do. Where are you going?”

She went over to the closet and put on the gray fur coat “Denton Street.” She smiled. “Fitting, don’t you think? The brunette being stalked by her only natural enemy?”

“Leave that to me,” I said. “It’s my pigeon.”

She paid no attention and went on out. Her only natural enemy was boredom; she had to do something or go crazy. She came back shortly before eleven. In the industrial area around Denton Street everything was closed on Saturday. She had been shopping, however, and carried two packages that contained a gabardine topcoat and a new hat.

* * *

“All right, let’s see how you look,” she said. I turned and she studied me critically. It was seven a.m. Monday.

She nodded. “The suit is a little snug across the chest and the sleeves are half an inch too short, but it’ll never show when you have the topcoat on.”

I looked at myself in the full-length mirror. The last trace of the black eye was gone now, and with the hat on there wasn’t enough of the red hair showing to attract attention. My shoes were shined. I wore a white shirt with button-down collar and a conservative tie, and a folded handkerchief and fountain pen peeped over the edge of the breast pocket of the jacket. I put on the topcoat.

“And now the clincher,” she said. She handed me the briefcase. It was a slender one, of the type with no handles, zipper-closed, and rather old and beat-up. There were a couple of magazines in it, and some advertising circulars and two or three meaningless letters she had typed out. As she had pointed out, it was the perfect piece of camouflage.

She grinned. “Darling, I just *know* you’re going to land that Ficklefinger account today and get the raise.”

“I think I’ll get by,” I said, “if they don’t look too closely at my face.”

“Who ever looks closely at men’s faces?”

“Professional cops,” I said. “The very people we’re trying to fool.”

She shook her head. “They don’t have a photograph, as far as we know. You could walk right up and borrow a light from any policeman in town—as long as you don’t do anything that looks suspicious. Don’t act nervous. And above all, don’t run when nobody’s chasing you. Maybe he just wants to borrow a match himself. Don’t worry about entering of leaving the building. There are thirty-three apartments in it, and not one of the tenants knows ten per cent of the others, even by sight? Ready?”

“Yes,” I said.

“You go first. And you know where to meet me.”

“I wish you’d let me go alone. If I’m picked up and you’re with me, they can make it really rough. You could go to prison.”

“You’ll be much safer in the car. The first time, anyway, until you get over some of the nervousness. I’m going.”

There was no use arguing with her. “All right,” I said. “But remember, if I get in a jam, get the hell out of there —fast.”

She opened the door and peered out into the corridor. “All clear,” she said softly. I went out. The stairs were just around the corner. I walked down two flights, and punched the button of one of the self-service

elevators. It came. I went out through the small lobby. It was a cold, clear morning without wind, and there was frost on the grass in front of the building.

Morning traffic was picking up along the street, which paralleled the edge of the park. I turned right and went up the sidewalk. There were a few pedestrians striding briskly along. For the first minute or two I felt naked and scared and wanted to shrug down inside the coat and pull my hat over my face. There was a bus stop at the corner. I passed it and went on to the next one, two blocks away.

Several people were waiting here, and there was a newspaper rack. I dropped a dime in the box and picked up an *Express*. No one paid any attention to me.

Stedman's murder was still on the front page. Three men answering my description had been picked up in skid-row flophouses and later released. I shivered slightly. My greatest danger was that there were at least half a dozen detectives on the force who might know me by sight from having seen me around the Sidelines Bar. If I ran into one of them, I was a dead duck.

I saw the blue Olds coming. It slid to a stop at the curb and I got in. There was a map of the city in the glove compartment. I spread it open, partly as an excuse to keep my face down.

"I know how to get there," she said. "I sized it up pretty thoroughly on Saturday. Denton Street's in an industrial area three or four blocks from the ship channel. You see it—there in back of the Municipal docks, about two miles from downtown and three or four miles up from the Southlands Refinery."

"I see it now," I said. We stopped for a traffic light.

"If we're lucky enough to find a parking place near that diner, I think we can watch two bus stops at once."

Traffic was growing heavier. She swung off the arterial, bypassing the downtown area, and in about fifteen minutes she turned into Denton in the 1200 block. "Four blocks now," she said. "The. Comet Boat Company's 1636."

I looked at my watch. It was still twenty minutes before eight. The traffic was mostly buses and trucks. She backed into a parking place. I looked around. On this side 0f the street the whole block was taken up by

the Comet plant, a long brick building enclosed by a steel mesh fence. Directly across from us was a low frame building with a number of small windows. The sign said GEORGE'S. That would be the lunchroom. Next to it was a large wholesale plumbing supply outfit.

She lighted a cigarette. "There's another coffee place in the block behind us and one two blocks ahead. So if she came into George's, there's a good chance she works in the office of one of the four places in these two blocks. There's Comet, the Hildebrand Plumbing Supply, and across the street in the next block is the Warren Paint Company. And directly ahead of us, beyond the next corner, is the Shiloh Machine Tool Company. It seems to be the largest."

There was a bus zone almost in front of the diner on the other side and one at the corner ahead of us. We had a good view of both. The car parked ahead of us was a small foreign sedan and we could see over it. The sun was spilling into the street now, and the air was warmer. I rolled down the window.

"Here comes one," she said. A bus passed us and pulled into the curb up ahead. Fifteen or twenty people got off, but they were all men carrying lunch boxes.

"It's still too early for any of the office force," she reminded me.

"Yes," I said. I wondered how much further into left field we could go before we were up against the wall. We were looking for a girl we'd never seen. We weren't even positive she existed. Red could have been mistaken. And if he weren't, it was over a month ago. And there was no evidence at all that the girl he'd seen in the Sidelines had had anything to do with Stedman other than that he'd picked her up. He did that all the time.

More buses came by, still loaded with workmen. It was after eight now. I slipped out and put a nickel in the parking meter.

"That Shiloh Machine Tool Company," she said musingly. "I keep thinking there's something familiar about the name."

"Wasn't it a battle in the Civil War?" I asked.

She gestured impatiently. "Yes, of course. In April of sixty-two, just south of Pittsburgh Landing on the Tennessee, Grant and Buell against Johnston and Beauregard. It was a very bloody and disorganized affair, green troops hacking away at each other in isolated detachments lost in the thickets—" She broke off. "But I didn't mean to get started on that. What I

meant was I've seen the name somewhere recently. It keeps bothering me. Oh, well, I suppose it wasn't important."

Cars began coming into the Comet parking lot, and office workers were getting off the buses now. Some of the girls were dark-haired. Each time I saw one I felt a surge of hope, but none of them ever answered the description Red had given me.

"She might have changed her hairdo in a month," Suzy said. "It could be cut short."

"She could even be a blonde by now."

She grinned. "Don't fire, men, until you see the roots of their hair."

By nine o'clock we knew we'd drawn a blank. She pulled out of the parking place and drove down toward the beach. On the way we passed the big Southlands Refinery. As we drove by the Marine Department gate I stared longingly at it. She noticed it. "You'll make it yet, Irish," she said.

I didn't answer. I felt too rotten to say anything.

"What would they do with your clothes and license and things?" she asked. "I mean, when the ship had to leave without you?"

"Take them off and hold them there in the Marine Department," I said. "Captain Bryce's office—"

I broke off suddenly, freezing with fear. A siren had cut loose in a short burst not a hundred yards behind us.

"Don't panic," she whispered. "I think I was just going too fast."

The police car snarled its way up abreast of us in the inside-lane and the driver waved us over. She eased off onto the gravel shoulder and stopped. He stopped ahead of us, got out, and walked back. My mouth was dry, and I shoved my hands in the pockets of the topcoat to hide their trembling.

He leaned an arm on the window on her side and looked in. I fought an impulse to turn my face away. He was about thirty, lean, alert, with a wind-burned face and unemotional gray eyes. He scarcely glanced at me. "Lady, that's a twenty-five-mile zone past the refinery."

"Oh," she said contritely. "I—I'm sorry, Officer. I guess I was going a little faster than that, wasn't I?"

"Forty," he said, somewhat less sternly. She was pretty and sorry, and far too smart to gush or turn on too much charm. "Can I see your driver's license?"

I breathed softly and went on fighting that impulse to turn and try to hide my face. Thank God she was so spectacular; he couldn't see past her. She handed him the license. He checked it, tapped it thoughtfully against his thumbnail, and handed it back.

"All right," he said. "We'll let it go this time. But watch it. Those signs mean what they say."

"Thank you, Officer. I'll be careful."

For the first time, then, he looked past her at me. For an instant his eyes were squarely on my face. It was like a year. Then he turned away and walked back to his car. Once he paused, as if about to turn around. She pulled back on the pavement, and as we went past him he stared thoughtfully after us.

We were drawing away now. I watched the mirror, holding my breath. Then I saw him slip behind the wheel and slam the door. The car clawed its way back onto the pavement and was after us like a big cat.

"Here he comes!" I said. "He recognized me."

"Maybe I can outrun him. Until you can get out—"

"No," I said harshly. "Listen, when he waves you over, stop. After he grabs me, go to pieces. Say I was threatening you with a gun in my topcoat pocket. Take it from there."

He wasn't using the siren now, but he was closing on us as if we were standing still. He came up abreast and motioned us over. She pulled off. He stopped behind us. There was no use trying to get out and run; he'd cut me down before I could get twenty feet.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Remember, I forced my way into the car."

He came up on her side and looked in. There was a sheepish grin on his face. "It didn't sink in at first," he said. "Those first names threw me. You're Suzy Patton, aren't you?"

He wondered if she would autograph a book for his wife if she brought it over. His wife was crazy about Suzy Patton. She gave him the address. He thanked her and tipped his cap. We drove off. After about a mile I took out cigarettes and tried to light one with hands that were as limp and useless as jelly.

Eight

Neither of us said anything until we came down to the beach and she parked near the jetties at the entrance to the ship channel.

“I can see why fugitives crack after awhile and get caught,” she said.

I nodded. “Nobody could take more than a few of those.”

It was warmer now. The water was sparkling and blue in the slight offshore breeze. A tanker came down the channel, headed seaward. I could see the men on the flying bridge, taking her out, and felt sick. I’d never be up there again. They’d catch me. Today, tomorrow, sometime. I’d spend the rest of my life in a cell.

She had fallen silent. “What are you thinking about?” I asked

“Shiloh,” she said.

“The battle? Or that machine tool company?”

“A little of each, I think. And fugitives. And what it’s really like to be a fugitive.” She fumbled absently in her purse for a cigarette. I lighted it for her. “Take a Union soldier,” she went on. “Maybe he was captured when Prentiss’s division was cut off and sent to the rear. And then escaped behind the Confederate lines after Bragg’s rearguard action and the withdrawal toward Corinth. He was wounded and in enemy territory—” Her voice trailed off and she stared out over the water.

“But what does this have to do with the factory?”

“Nothing.” Then she glanced at her watch. “But we’ve got to get back if we’re going to catch the coffee break.”

“I’ll take it from here,” I said. “You drop me and go on back to the apartment.”

* * *

She let me out three blocks away and I walked slowly up Denton Street in the sunlight. It was ten-fifteen. Just as I reached George’s coffee shop two

girls came out of the gate at the Comet Boat Company across the street. One was brown-haired, the other blonde. I opened the screen door and went inside.

There was a long counter at right angles to the doorway, and to the right were ten or twelve booths. I went on around to the far end of the counter and sat down facing the door. There were two men and a girl at the counter, and I was aware of some more people at two of the booths, though I hadn't looked at them yet. I set the briefcase on the counter and unzipped it to take out one of the letters Suzy had typed.

The waitress came over. "Yes, sir? May I help you?"

I glanced up. "Oh. Coffee, please. And one of those rolls."

"Yes, sir." She drew the coffee and placed it in front of me, and put the sweet roll on a plate. I took a sip of the coffee, pushed it to one side, and opened the letter, and as I did so I glanced casually around the place. The girl at the counter was a dishwater blonde. There were two girls in one of the booths, and a girl and a man in another, but nobody was anywhere near the description Red had given me. I unclipped the fountain pen and started making some notes on the bottom of the letter. The two girls I'd seen leaving the Comet office came in. Five or ten minutes went by, and the place was filling up. I ate some of the roll, sweated out the coffee as long as I could, and ordered some more.

They came in by twos and threes, mostly girls talking and laughing. From where I was sitting I could watch the door without appearing to. I glanced at my watch. It was ten-thirty-five. The whole thing was a pipe dream, I thought. The screen door opened again. I glanced up, and I was looking right at her.

There was no doubt of it at all. And no doubt that Red really had an eye. She was with two other girls that nobody would ever see unless they took their clothes off or dyed themselves purple. They sat down at a booth near the door and ordered coffee. I went on making notes on the back of the letter, carefully concealing my excitement.

In a moment I shot another glance at her. She was sitting alone on one side of the booth with the other two facing her and was in left profile. There was no ring on her hand. She had on a brown tailored suit, white blouse, nylons, and high-heeled alligator shoes, and carried a very large alligator purse. The hair was midnight black, turned under on the ends and bouncing

off her shoulders. She was about five-five or five-six, not over twenty-five years old, and built like a dream. The skin was slightly olive and the lips full and red with a stunning shade of lipstick. She turned then, glancing around the place, and her eyes swept over me.

She'd caught me looking at her, but it didn't matter. The only thing that would ever strike her as unusual would be discovering a man who *wasn't* looking at her. The eyes were dark brown, and you could see the smoldering Latin fire in them. She paid no attention to me. I returned to my scribbling on the back of the letter and didn't look at her again. In about ten minutes they paid their checks and went out.

I put the papers back in the briefcase, lighted a cigarette, and sauntered out. They had turned to the left, and were about half a block away, going up the sidewalk on this side. They were already past the entrance to the plumbing supply company. They stopped at the corner, waited for the light to change, and crossed Denton. I walked slowly up to the corner. They crossed the intersecting street. In the middle of the next block they turned in. It was the entrance to the Shiloh Machine Tool Company.

Lathes and Milling Machines, the sign said. The plant was enclosed by a steel mesh fence and took up most of the block. There was an office building in front, at the entrance, and in back of it a larger building of dark red brick. I went on up the street on this side. Two blocks away I found a beer joint that had a phone booth and called Suzy.

"I found her," I said excitedly. "She works for that Shiloh outfit."

"Good," she replied. "Can I come and pick you up?"

"No. The next step is to find out where she lives. I'm going to try to follow her home tonight."

"It's only eleven now. You'll have six hours to kill."

"I know," I said. "But I'll be safe in a movie."

I caught a bus and rode to the downtown area. I didn't feel so naked and exposed in the large crowds of shoppers. Half a dozen times I passed uniformed policemen, and after awhile I stopped cringing inside my clothes when I saw one. The motion picture theaters were open now. I picked one showing a double feature and went inside.

At four-thirty I went out, bought an afternoon paper, and boarded a bus that would take me back to Denton Street. I unfolded the paper, SEAMAN SOUGHT IN POLICE MURDER STILL AT LARGE, a front-page

headline said. A Lt. Brannan of Homicide was quoted as saying it was obvious by now that somebody was hiding me.

“Any person knowing Foley’s whereabouts and withholding the information is a guilty of harboring a fugitive,” he went on. “This is a serious offense.”

At the next stop a man sat down beside me. I kept my attention on the paper, conscious that he was looking at it too. “Some bunch of cops,” he said. “Whole police force can’t find one dumb sailor.”

“Maybe he’s left town,” I said.

“Naah. Probably walkin’ around on the street right now. Whatta you suppose they’d do if they ever run up against a real smart cookie like Willie Sutton or somebody?”

“I don’t know,” I muttered. I wished he’d shut up. I turned to the comics and let him read them. Apparently he never had looked at me. I got off the bus at the Comet Boat Company and crossed to the other side of Denton. It was five minutes of five.

There was a parking lot inside the fence at the Shiloh Tool Company, and I could see about thirty cars in it. Since we hadn’t seen her get off a bus this morning there was a possibility she drove to work. If she did, I’d be out of luck. But at least I could spot the car, and tomorrow Suzy might be able to follow it. At five a whistle blew, and men came pouring out of the Shiloh plant, but none of the office staff emerged.

They came out at five-thirty. Some of them headed for their cars around at the side. In a moment I saw. her. She came on out to the sidewalk. She had on a lightweight cloth coat and was carrying the large alligator bag. When she reached the corner, she stopped, waited for the light, and came over on this side. She was going to catch the bus at the stop in front of the coffee shop.

I walked down that way behind her. There were five or six other people waiting, and a bus was coming now. It was already well loaded, but it pulled to the curb and the doors opened. She got on. I was last in line, and for an instant I was afraid I wasn’t going to make it. Then the driver yelled for everybody to move back, and I got aboard.

She was just beyond me, standing in the aisle and holding onto the bar. I could see more room at the rear, and squeezed past her, through the other

standees. She didn’t even look around. I went all the way back. I could see the dark head without any difficulty.

The bus went through the downtown section, and she almost caught me by surprise when she got off. I stepped down just as the doors were closing and picked her up again in the throngs hurrying along the sidewalk.

She went in the Second Avenue entrance of Waldman’s, the city’s largest department store. It was nearly six p.m. now, and the street lights were on. I picked her up again inside and stayed close behind her in the crowd. It occurred to me a professional would probably wince at the crude tailing I was doing, but she never once looked around, so it was all right. She went up an escalator to the second floor and stopped at the hosiery counter. I moved over to another aisle, staying behind her, and pretended interest in perfume while she bought a pair of nylons. She gave the clerk a charge-a-plate. The clerk stamped it on the slip, returned it. and put the stockings in a small bag.

She crossed to the other end of the floor and went into the women’s lounge. I moved back to where I could watch the doorway without being conspicuous, and found a chair and an ashtray. I lighted a cigarette. Some ten minutes went by. I began to worry. There might be another exit; maybe she’d spotted me, and had gone in there to give me the slip. Then, when I’d almost given up hope, she came out. She took the escalator back to the ground floor and went out the Butler Street entrance. It was six-thirty now, and darkness had fallen, but the streets were still crowded.

In the next block she stopped at a newsstand and bought a magazine, then entered a restaurant. It was on a corner, with large plate glass windows on both sides. I could see her without going in myself. She ordered a sandwich and coffee and looked at the magazine while she was eating. The corner where I was standing was a bus stop. In about twenty minutes she paid her check and came out I moved back, and she came over and stood on the curb where I had been. I sighed. Maybe she was going home at last.

She boarded a Montlake bus, the number seven line. Two more passengers got on after her, and then I climbed aboard. She had found a seat and opened the magazine and didn’t look up as I went past. I went on to the rear and sat down.

I opened the paper and pretended to read, keeping my face down. The bus turned north along a heavily traveled arterial. We passed a district of

apartment houses. Several passengers got off. She went on reading. After awhile the bus swung off onto quieter streets and we went past a large housing development. At every stop one or two passengers debarked. Soon there were only five of us left. I wondered why she lived so far out; we must be miles from downtown. Then she put the magazine away and started watching the stops.

"Stevens," the driver called out. She gathered up her things and came back to the rear door. The bus stopped and she got down. The door closed, but just before we got under way again I glanced up suddenly from my paper and asked, "This Stevens?"

"That's right," the driver said. I grabbed the briefcase and got off. The bus went on. I took out a cigarette and stood momentarily on the corner as I lighted it. It was a run-down district of older frame houses. Diagonally across the intersection a service station was a glaring oasis of light, but there were few cars on the street. She crossed the intersection and turned right opposite the service station, going up the sidewalk under the trees on the far side. As well as I could tell, she never had looked back, but I hoped we didn't have far to go. In this lonely and outlying district she'd be almost certain to spot me before long. When she was about halfway up the block, I crossed the street and fell in behind her.

It was shadowy under the trees, and there were street lights only at the intersections. She crossed the next street, still going straight ahead. It was very quiet, even this early in the evening, and I could hear her heels tapping on the walk. There were fewer houses in this block. One car went past, splashing us with its headlights, but she didn't look around.

There were no houses at all in the third block. It was a playground or park, enclosed in a high wire fence. The sidewalk was in heavy shadow from the eucalyptus trees along the curb. Across the street was a dark building that appeared to be a school. She went on at the same unhurried pace, about fifty yards ahead of me. Somewhere near the middle of the block I made out the dark bulk of a car parked at the curb. She passed it. I tensed up, suddenly wary, but I was too late. A massive shadow detached itself from the bole of one of the trees and stepped right in front of me. I tried to duck to one side, but the gun crashed at point-blank range, the little tongue of flame licking at the sleeve of my topcoat.

Something slammed into me just below my ribs. It was like being hit in the belly with a baseball bat. I rocked backward and spun halfway around and my knees caved under me and I fell. I tried to cry out, but I couldn't even breathe. Cold pavement was against my face, and I could feel it grinding under my cheek and the side of my jaw as I kept opening and closing my mouth in a silent and futile spasm as if I were trying to bite loose some air and swallow it. I could hear. Her heels were clicking on the walk as she ran, coming nearer, and his shoes scraped as he took two steps and squatted beside me. A hand touched my arm, and groped its way across my chest.

She ran up. "Hurry!" she gasped. "What are you doing? Let's get out of here."

"He's just gut-shot. You want him talking when they find him?"

The hand moved again and was on the side of my throat. He grunted. He was coolly locating my head, so he could put the gun muzzle against it. My whole torso was still numb, as if I'd been cut in two, but suddenly I was breathing again. I grabbed the hand and pulled. He came down on top of me like a falling horse. The gun went off. I heard it clatter on the pavement, and then slide as somebody hit it with a thrashing arm or leg. He swung at me and I heard his fist smash against concrete, He sucked his breath in sharply and cursed.

"Find the damned gun!" he snapped.

He was as strong as a bull and could have broken me in two if he'd ever been able to get hold of me squarely, but I was thrashing like a wild man. We tumbled over and rolled again.

"I can't find it," she cried out. "I don't even know where it went."

"Well, get the knife out of my pocket! I can't hold him and reach for it."

"We haven't got time. There's somebody coming, at the next corner."

I broke free of him momentarily and tried to scramble to my feet. A big hand caught me in the chest and slammed me over backward. My head hit the pavement and lights exploded in it. I wasn't completely out, but I was helpless. I felt myself being lifted and dragged, with my legs trailing limply along the walk. A voice said, "Open the door." I fell on my back. Somebody doubled my legs up and the car door slammed. I must have gone out then for a moment, for the next thing I was conscious of was the high-pitched scream of rubber as we took a corner.

I was sick and still had that sensation of having been cut in two. I realized dimly that I was lying on the floor in the back of the car and that they were in the front seat.

“Watch him,” the man said. “If he comes to, sing out.”

It was strange there,wasn’t more pain. Being shot in the belly was like having your wind knocked out at football. Well, it would start in a minute. Except that they’d finish the job as soon as they found a place to stop. I thought of that knife, and could feel the nausea welling up in me.

“How in the name of God did you miss him?” she asked.

“Miss him, hell! It knocked him down.”

She gasped. “You hit the briefcase! I told you he was carrying a briefcase under his arm.”

“Oh, Christ!” We swung another corner. “Well, here! Take this.” I heard the metallic *tunnnk* a switch-blade knife makes as it opens. “You can reach him. Right in the bottom of the throat and then down—”

“In the car?”

“Of course in the car, you fool. We can’t stop here.”

“You’ll have to do it. This is beginning to make me sick.”

“Well, of all the chicken-livered—!”

“I can’t help it!” she cried out. “It’s taking too long.”

“All right, all right. Just watch him till I can find a street.”

My head was clearing a little and some sensation returning to my body. I was lying on something hard that was gouging into my hip. Moving my hand very slowly, I reached down and touched it. It felt familiar, a smooth of wood tapering to a point and rounded and heavier on the other end. I worked my fingers around the small end of it. She was probably looking over the back of front seat at me, but it was very dark down here and all could see was my face.

It was now or never. I pushed myself erect and slid onto seat. She cried out a warning and tried to reach me with the knife. I ignored her and swung the fid as hard I could at his head. It wasn’t heavy enough to do any damage, but he grunted and slammed on the brakes. I hit her across the arm with it. The knife dropped. She kneeling on the front seat, still reaching for me, while he tried to get out the door. He took his foot off the brake, and the car started forward again, but stalled. I swept an arm, caught her across the chest, and dropped backward across him and the steering wheel. The horn

began blowing. For the first time, I was conscious there were lights around us. On the front seat, beyond her threshing silken legs, was the big alligator purse. I grabbed it, pushed her back on top of him again, and jumped out. Brakes screamed, and a man's voice cursed me. He'd come behind, and tried to swing around us. One of his fenders bumped me and threw me off stride, but I didn't fall. I danced sidewise, swinging the purse to keep my balance.

I was in the middle of a neighborhood business district. Opposite me, colored lights blazed on and off on the marquee of a movie theater, and on the other side of the street was a big drugstore. Cars slid to a stop and horns began to blow. I ran for the curb.

"Purse snatcher!" somebody yelled. A man leaped from a stalled car and tried to head me off. I dodged him. Two more along the sidewalk took up the chase. A woman was screaming, "Call the police! Call the police." At the corner ahead was a filling station, and two men in white coveralls were running out in the street to stop me. I was cut off in that direction. I whirled in the middle of the street and went the other way, dodging through the cars. I made it onto the sidewalk beyond the drugstore. A man reached for me. I swung an arm and knocked him down. Just as I reached the corner I heard a siren somewhere behind me. Half dozen men were chasing me now. I turned the corner and ran another block. I was drawing away from them. It was a residential area here, and not so well lighted. I was under trees again. I crossed another intersection and ran on. All the men on foot had given up now, but the siren was still wailing and when I looked back I saw headlights. There was an alley in the middle of the block. I ducked into it. The police car went past. Halfway down the alley a gate was open into a back yard. I slipped into it, hoping there was no dog. None challenged me. I pushed the gate closed and slid into dense shadows in a clump of oleanders. I could hear another siren screaming in the direction of the business district.

Lights were on in the house, but the curtains were drawn over the window facing the back yard. I could see the silhouettes of the occupants as they moved across the room. I was gasping for breath and my side and abdomen hurt as if they'd been beaten with clubs. My hat was gone, as well as the briefcase, but I still had the alligator purse in a death grip under my arm. Minutes went by and I began to get my breath. I touched my side, exploring the area just under my ribs, and winced.

I'd been holding the briefcase about there, under my arm. There'd been a *New Yorker* in it, and a copy of *Fortune*. The slug must have hit them at just a slight angle and they'd turned it before it could go all the way through, but I'd still taken the full impact of it. There was no wonder it had spun me around and knocked me down.

The lights went out in the rear of the house and I heard music come on somewhere inside. The sounds of pursuit had died away now, but I had to ditch the purse before I dared go back out on the street again. It was too big to hide. I opened it and knelt in the shadow of the oleanders and flicked on the cigarette lighter, shielding the flame with my body. When I flipped open the wallet, the first thing I saw was a driver's license. I slipped it out and dropped the wallet back in the purse. *Frances Celaya,* it said. *2712 Randall Street, Apartment 203.* And in the bottom of the purse, amid the clutter of bobby pins, lipstick, mirror, and comb, was a key. I'd had to get shot to do it, but I'd got just what I was after. I dropped the key and driver's license in the pocket of my topcoat, and shoved the purse far back into the oleanders. It would be safer to wait another half hour or so, but I was in a hurry now. Slipping out the gate, I went on down the alley. When I came out onto the next street, it was quiet. I turned left, going away from the business district. After five or six blocks I began to breathe more freely. Apparently the police regarded it as a routine purse-snatching; if they'd recognized me from the description, the area would be saturated with patrol cars. But now that I'd lost my hat, trying to move anywhere in the open was dangerous. I'd have to find a phone booth. I went on through the quiet residential streets. After another ten or fifteen minutes I saw a traffic light some four or five blocks down an intersecting street and headed that way.

The name of the street was Octavia, and I was in the 700 block. Just around the corner was a small neighbored shopping center; I could see a supermarket that was still open, a bakery, and a drugstore. There were no police cars in sight. I ducked into the drugstore, feeling naked in the light, but no one paid any attention to me. There were telephone booths. I slipped into one and dialed the apartment. Suzy answered on the first ring.

"Where are you?" she asked quickly. "Are you all right?"

"So far," I said. "But I had a little trouble. And I've lost the hat. Can you pick me up?"

"I'm on my way. Where are you?"

I told her. “Just park in the supermarket lot. I’ll come out and get in.”

“I think I know where Octavia is. It’ll be about twenty minutes. Try to stay out of sight.”

“Sure,” I said. She hung up. I dropped in another dime and dialed the number of that phone booth in the Sidelines Bar. A man answered.

“Is Red there?” I asked.

“Just a moment.”

I waited. In a minute somebody picked up the receiver and I heard the door close. “Red?” I asked softly.

“Yeah. How are you, boy?”

“Still afloat, anyway,” I said. “But, listen. You may be in trouble now. Watch your step and don’t go down any dark alleys.”

“What is it?”

“That girl you told me about—Miss Stacked, Dark, and Deadly. I located her and tried to follow her home to find out who she was and where she lived, and she lowered the boom on me, but good. She also has a very rugged boy friend. She may figure out that it could have been you that put me on her trail. If she does, lock your door and hide under the bed.”

“Thanks for the tip. But what are you going to do?”

“Go see her. I’ve got her name and address now.”

“But, look. How about hiring a lawyer and giving yourself up? I’ll call Wittner for you. He’s the best in the state.”

“No,” I said. “There’s not a shred of proof she had anything to do with Stedman. I don’t know who the boy friend is, and believe me, they’d never get it out of her.”

“But if she recognized you, she must have seen you in Stedman’s apartment.”

“Sure. That’s the only place she could have seen me before. But we can’t prove it. So far, we can’t prove anything. I’ve got the key to her apartment, though, and I want to see what I can find.”

“Well, be careful, will you?”

I hung up and looked at my watch. It was five of nine, and it would be at least another fifteen minutes before she could get here. A phone booth was a good place to stay out of sight. I fished out another dime of the twenty she’d provided me with this morning.

I looked up the number of the Seamen's Union, dialed it, and got hold of the dispatcher. "I'm trying to locate a seaman named Bullard," I said. "Would you take a gander and see if he's on your beach list?"

"What's the first name?" he asked.

"There you've got me," I replied. "I don't know. I'm not even sure he's a member, or that he goes to sea any more. But he's a great big guy, built like an anchor windlass. And if he does ship out it's probably on deck."

"Hmmm, let's see—No, there's nobody named Bullard on the beach right now. But we got several members by that name—I know two myself. Johnny Bullard and Step-and-a-half Bullard. I think Step's first name is Raymond. Bad knee. Strafed on the Murmansk run in World War I— "

"How about Johnny?" I asked.

"Young guy. About twenty-five. Ships as Ordinary. He's at sea now. We shipped him out on a Victory last week, for Rio and B.A."

"No-o," I said. "The one I'm looking for was in some kind of trouble here a few years back, during a strike."

"Oh, you mean that fink bastard! Well, look, friend—he's not a member of this union, and never was. But I'll you what. If he ever shows up around here, you can come get him. Just bring a blotter."

"You got any idea where he is?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Let's just say I'd like to get in touch with him. I might have the blotter ready now. What do you know about him?"

'His name's Ryan Bullard. And except for being a rat, a fink, a scab, a thug, and a goon, he's one of the sweetest guys you'll ever meet. And, oh yes, he's also an ex-con, I understand. And he beat a seaman to death with a baseball bat."

"When?" I asked.

"About five years ago. During the Inland Boatmen's strike. Bullard was scabbing, and he killed a picket. He was arrested and charged with murder, but before the trial both the witnesses disappeared. Later on, they found one of 'em in the bay."

"Murdered?"

"Yeah, unless he always went swimming with a Ford transmission tied to his leg. Anyway, Bullard got a hung jury the first time and beat it on the second trial. But he hasn't been around here for years. Right after the trial

he shipped out on some pot under the Panamanian flag. I think I did hear a couple of years ago that he was doing time in a Cuban pen for working over one of Batista's strong boys. And somebody else says he's been shrimping out of Pensacola or Tampa. I don't know; you always hear stories."

"Okay, thanks a million," I said.

We were as far out in left field as ever, I thought. Where could there be any connection between Frances Celaya and Ryan Bullard and Stedman? Bullard had been gone from here for years. Frances Celaya worked for a machine tool company. And Stedman was just a detective who thought he was God's gift to women. I shook my head and went back outside. My stomach and ribs felt as if I'd been run over by a tank.

It wouldn't do to stand around. I walked back up through the residential streets for about ten minutes, and when I came back the blue Olds was just pulling into the parking lot. I went over and got in. She was wearing the gray fur coat, with the collar turned up about her throat. I kissed her, and she clung to me for an instant.

"I've been scared," she said. "What happened?"

"I'll tell you on the way," I said. "Do you know how to get to the 2700 block on Randall Street?"

"Randall? Yes. That'd be near the downtown area. Why?"

"Let's go," I said. "That's where our girl friend lives. I'm going to call on her."

Nine

She swung over on Octavia and into an arterial heading downtown. I told her about it.

"Oh, my God," she said, horrified. "I never heard of anything as cold-blooded and brutal. You can't go there."

"I've got to," I said. "Maybe I can find out something about her. There must be some lead to Stedman."

"But suppose they're there?"

"I'll just have to take a chance on it. Anyway, he hasn't got the gun now."

She stopped for a traffic light. "Why do you suppose she didn't just call the police when she recognized you?"

"Too risky," I said. "She figured I must know *something*, or I wouldn't be following her. If they picked me up, I might sell them on it too. Incidentally, I suppose that john there at Waldman's has phone booths?"

"Yes, of course."

"She's a smart baby," I said. "She suspected that would never occur to a dumb sailor, and she was right. If I'd seen her make the phone call, I might have begun to suspect something when we wound up out there in the sticks."

"The horrible part of it is you *know* now she was in Stedman's apartment when the two of you were fighting."

"That's right. Know it and can't possibly prove it."

Traffic was lighter now, and it took only about twenty minutes. She turned off the arterial before we got downtown, swung over eight or ten blocks, and hit Randall in the 3100 block. We turned left. It was apparently a low-rent apartment house district. She slowed as we went by. 2712 was a three-story building of dingy red brick.

"Turn right at the corner," I said. "I want you to park at least a block away. And if I get in trouble and police start swarming in here, get out fast."

“Please be careful,” she said. We found a place to park a little over a block from Randall, and I squeezed her hand, got out, and walked back. There were a few pedestrians out, but no police cars in sight. Most of the windows across the front of 2712 showed lights. I crossed the street and stepped into the vestibule.

To the right of the doorway was a row of buttons opposite the little nameplate holders. Some of them were blank, including 203. I pressed the button and waited. There was no answer. I tried twice more, just to be sure. Fine. She wasn’t home. I took out the key, but when I tried to insert it in the door it wouldn’t go in. That was odd; usually any apartment key in the building would unlock the downstairs door so you didn’t have to carry two. Well, it didn’t matter. I reached over and pressed three or four of the buttons. The door buzzed. I shoved it open and went in. There was a central hall, going straight back, and stairs on the right and left.

The second floor was the same arrangement. Number 203 was the second apartment on the left. There was no one in sight, but I could hear music and snatches of television programs from beyond the doors. I hoped the apartments had rear entrances. It was going to be deadly if she came back with that big gorilla and caught me. Maybe he even lived here with her. Well, I’d find out as soon as I got inside.

I was putting the key to the lock when I heard the front door open down below and then heavy footsteps on the stairs. The key didn’t go in. I must have it upside down. I reversed it. It still wouldn’t insert. I looked at the number on the door. This was the right one—203. The footsteps were nearing the top of the stairs now, and I began to feel panicky. But maybe he’d go on to the third floor. I turned slightly, and stood with my back toward the stairs as if waiting for someone inside to answer my knock.

The footsteps came up behind me, and a man’s voice asked, “You looking for somebody?”

I had to turn around. He was a tall, bony-faced man wearing a bus driver’s cap and whipcord jacket. “I guess there’s nobody home,” I said.

He regarded me stonily. “I’m here. Whatta you want?”

Before I could think of anything to say, he caught sight of the key that was still in my hand. He grabbed the front of my topcoat. “Why, you dirty sneak-thief!”

I jerked down on his wrists and broke the hold on my coat, and tried to get past him. He reached for me again. I hit him in the face. He rocked back on his heels, but didn't fall. "Thief!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Burglar!" He lunged at me, flailing his arms. He seemed to have six or seven. I hit him in the stomach. He doubled over, but managed to fall into me and get his arms around my legs. We both fell. Doors were opening along the corridor now, and people were spilling into it. I tried to get up, but he was all over me like four cocker spaniels.

"Call the police!" he was yelling now. I rolled out from under him once more, peeled his arms loose, and got to my feet. He scrambled up. I swung, connected with his jaw, and this time I dropped him. I wheeled and ran toward the stairs. A man shot out of 201 and tried to tackle me. I stiff-armed him and slipped past, but somebody got me from behind. We crashed to the floor. I rolled up and over him, and swung at his face. He grunted. I pushed to my feet once more in pandemonium that was like a fire in a madhouse and lunged toward the stairs.

The one who'd missed the tackle was after me now. I stopped abruptly on the landing, swinging inward toward the wall, and when he came even with me I hit him. He shot against the railing, stumbled, and rolled on down the stairs. I jumped over him and streaked for the door. Now the occupants of the lower floor were erupting into the corridor, and a fat man in a bathrobe was running to head me off.

I didn't know why I hadn't thought of it before. I stuck my hand down in the pocket of the topcoat and snapped, "All right! Back inside, all of you!" The fat man skidded to a stop almost on top of me like a character in an animated cartoon, and his eyes went wide with fright. The one who'd rolled down the steps changed his mind about getting up, and froze. I slipped sidewise toward the door and got my hand on it.

"Anybody that comes out is going to get shot," I said. I went out. The street was deserted and quiet, but I knew that wouldn't last more than a few seconds. I could hear a siren somewhere already. I broke into a run, crossing the street and turning right. Two or three of the hardier ones had already come out of the vestibule to see which way I went.

I made the turn at the corner and was on the street parallel to the one where she was parked. The siren was screaming somewhere not over five or six blocks behind me now. I put on another burst of speed and when I

reached the next corner I shot a glance behind me. The cruiser still wasn't in sight, and nobody was chasing me on foot. I turned left and ran down the street parallel to Randall, headed toward her. She might be gone now, or if they were in sight when I reached the car I'd have to run on by and ignore her, but there was still a chance. I reached the corner. The Olds was still there.

I looked back. A car was coming slowly along the street behind me, but it had no police markings. I shot across the pavement and climbed in. She already had the engine running. We tore away from the curb. I was gasping for breath. She asked no questions. We swung left at the next corner and sped along a quiet street for two blocks. I watched the mirror. There were two or three cars behind us but no flashing lights or sirens. She turned left again, and when we crossed Randall I looked up the street. There was a police car and a crowd of people before the apartment house, and another cruiser was just screeching around the corner beyond it where I had turned. We were in the clear. I sighed. She slowed a little now and went on over and hit the arterial, turning left, away from downtown.

I fumbled cigarettes out of my pocket and noticed I'd hurt my right hand again; the knuckles were skinned, and it was beginning to swell. I lighted two cigarettes, and passed one to her.

"Thanks," I said. "But you shouldn't have waited. You're taking too many chances."

"What happened?" she asked.

"I was caught trying to get in." I pulled the driver's license from my pocket and checked it. *2712 Randall Street, Apartment 203*. "It was an old address," I said wearily. "She's moved."

"And there's no new one on the back?"

"No," I said.

The same thought apparently occurred to both of us at the same instant, but when we glanced at each other we shrugged and neither of us said anything. Maybe it was illegal. But then so was killing policemen.

"What now?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe if I'll let him shoot me they'll give me the new address."

"Was there anything else in her purse that might have address on it? A letter, or something?"

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. Anyway, the purse is gone. I don’t have the slightest idea where I was when I ditched it in that backyard.”

We drove on in silence for a few minutes. Then I said, “Let’s watch for a phone booth. I want to make a telephone call.”

“Why not make it from the apartment? We’ll be there ten minutes.”

“No. They might be able to trace it. I’m going to call the police.”

She glanced around at me and nodded. “That may be the best idea you’ve had yet. They might look her up.”

“It’s worth a try, at least.”

About two miles farther on there was a mammoth shopping center on the right. And on the sidewalk between the street and the parking area were two telephone booths side by side. She pulled to the curb near them. Some of the stores were still open, and the area was well lighted, with numbers of people about, but it should be safe enough. No one would see me very well inside the booth.

One was already occupied. I stepped into the other, closed the door, and reached for the book. It would be much better if I could talk to one of them at home; there’d be less chance of his being able to trace the call. What was the name of that Homicide Lieutenant in the paper? Brennan? No. Brannan —that was it. I might get more results if I talked to the man in charge, anyway. I looked up in the book. There were fifteen or twenty Brannans but only one listed as a Lieutenant .I dialed the number.

His wife answered. “No. I’m sorry. He was called back the station awhile ago.”

“Thank you,” I said.

I started to hang up, but she cut in quickly, “Wait. He may be coming now.”

I waited. She came back. “He just drove in. If you’ll hold on—”

I thanked her. In a moment a man’s voice said, “Brannan speaking.” He sounded tired.

“I’ve got a tip for you,” I said. “I can tell you who killed Stedman.”

“Yes?” There was little interest in his voice. Then I re-remembered reading that in any murder case they got hundreds of tips, mostly worthless and usually from screwballs. “Who’s this?”

“It doesn’t matter.” I went on quickly, “Just listen. It was a girl. Her name is Frances Celaya. She works for the Shiloh Machine Tool Company.

You got that?”

“Yes,” he said boredly. “Now tell me who you are. And where you picked up this idea.”

“Never mind who I am,” I said. “But I can tell you definitely this girl was in Stedman’s apartment the night he was killed. She’s a Latin type, a real dish, about twenty-five years old, and she used to live at Apartment 203, 2712 Randall Street, but she’s moved.”

“Hold it!” The boredom and the weariness were gone as if they’d never existed. His voice was suddenly alive, and very brisk and professional. “What was that number again?”

“2712 Randall. Apartment 203.”

“Check. Now, don’t hang up on me. You must be Foley?”

“All right. I am. But don’t try to trace this call.”

“Cut it out. There’s no way I can trace a call from here. But I want to tell you something. You’re in one hell of a mess.”

I sighed. “Thanks for telling me. Now do you want to hear what I’ve got to say? If not, I’ll hang up.”

“Go ahead. But when you get through I want you to listen to me for a minute. Okay?”

“Right,” I said. I told him about trying to follow Frances Celaya home and what had happened. “So she saw me in Stedman’s apartment that night,” I finished. “That’s the only way in the world she could have recognized me. She knew I was after her, and she tried to kill me.”

“But did you see *her* in the apartment?”

“No. I didn’t see anybody. Except Stedman.” “Then what put you on her trail?”

”I can’t tell you that,” I said. “It involves a friend of mine.”

“Your story doesn’t make any sense.”

“I know it doesn’t. I’m just telling you what happened. I don’t know anything about her at all, or why she’d want to kill Stedman. I can’t tell you who that big goon is, or even what he looks like, because it was too dark. But I’m pretty sure he’s a seaman or used to be one.”

“Why?”

“When he was telling the girl to watch me, he said if I came around, to sing out. Sing out is a seagoing expression, and one of the few that sailors ever use ashore. And that thing I hit him with was a fid.”

“What’s a fid?”

“It’s a heavy wooden spike, pointed at one end and rounded on the other, and it’s used in splicing line. So he might be working ashore as a rigger, or on small boats of some kind.”

“All right,” he said brusquely. “Now I want to give you some advice, Foley. I don’t think you realize the dangerous spot you’re in, so let me spell it out for you. It’s probably the luck of the stupid Irish, but you’ve been fouling up the police force of a whole city for a week. There are several hundred men out looking for you. Some of them haven’t been home for days. Some of ‘em have been chewed out till they’re numb. I’m one of ‘em. They’re tired, and they’re mad. You’re wanted for killing a cop. And now to top it off, you’re on the list as being armed and dangerous. Is it beginning to soak in?”

“I haven’t got a gun,” I said.

“Maybe not. But that’s not the point. You told the people in that Randall Street apartment you had one, and the only way those men out there can play it is by the book. You’re presumed to be armed, and if you make one phony move they’re going to cut you down. Tell me where you are.”

Somebody was rattling the door of the booth.

“Hold it a minute,” I told Brannan. The door opened and a big round face looked in at me. It had small black eyes set in it, a flat nose, a thinning fuzz of black hair around a bald head, and it was overflowing with the solemnity of the very drunk.

”Par’n me, Jack,” it said. It blinked at me, swayed unsteadily, and withdrew. It was attached to a massive, thickset body in dark trousers, and a dark gray sweater with no shirt. “You can have it in just a minute,” I said. I hoped he didn’t fall on the booth and knock it over.

“You still there?” Brannan asked.

“Yeah. What were you going to say?”

“Tell me where you are. When you hear the siren coming, stand in the open with your hands on top of your head.”

The party in the other booth went out now, and I heard the big drunk stagger in and try to dial somebody, humming to himself. “Nothing doing,” I said.

“All right. If you’re too stupid to care what happens to you, think about your friend. Somebody’s hiding you. And some of these judges can get

damned nasty about harboring a fugitive."

"I know that," I said. "So does he. But how about spending a few minutes of your time trying to catch the fugitive that *did* kill Stedman. I'll give you this once more, so write it down. Frances Celaya. That's C-e-l-a-y-a. Shiloh Machine Tool Company. Same name as the Civil War battle." I dropped the receiver on the hook and went back to the car. We pulled out into the traffic.

"Did it do any good?" she asked.

"I doubt it," I said. "But at least we tried."

She put the car in the basement garage. "You go on up," I said, "so if anybody recognizes me we won't be together." I waited five minutes. When I went around to the front door and pressed the buzzer she let me in. I met no one in the corridors. I tapped lightly on the apartment door and she opened it.

She had tossed the fur coat in the bedroom and was wearing a skirt and sweater outfit. The living room and her study were littered with books, notebooks, spread-out maps, and sheets of paper.

"Did you have a cyclone?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I've been doing some research. But let's see how badly you're hurt."

We went into the bedroom. I tossed the topcoat on the bed and stripped down to the waist. "Oh, good God, Irish," she exclaimed. One whole side of my torso, from lower ribs to groin, had turned black. I touched it. It hurt.

"Hadn't we better get a doctor?" she asked.

"No. He'd have to report me. I think it's just a bruise, and there's probably nothing wrong inside."

"Well, we'll see, in the morning. But you come lie down in the living room, and I'll fix you a drink. And some coffee and a sandwich."

She moved some of the books and maps off the sofa and I stretched out. I felt tired and beat-up and defeated. In a few minutes she brought me a Martini. When I sat up and drank it, life had a little better outlook. She put a sandwich and a cup of coffee on the low table before me and sat on the floor on the other side of it with a cigarette.

"Let's see where we stand now," she said thoughtfully. "That girl will never show up for work again, and the chances are she'll leave town. We don't have any idea who her boy friend is. It seems almost certain she was

in Stedman's apartment during the fight, she saw you, and she killed Stedman just after you left, and then left herself by the rear entrance just before the police arrived. But even if the police did pick her up now, there isn't one shred of evidence on which to hold her, and we don't have the faintest idea why she should want to kill Stedman. Was it jealousy? I mean, she might have heard you accuse Stedman of running around with your wife."

"No," I said. I drank some of the coffee. "I don't think I said a word to him. I just belted him. She must have deliberately picked Stedman up there in Red's bar because she was going to kill him when she had the chance. But why go to all that trouble? I mean, to play him along for ten days or so? She and that thug could have got him a lot easier than that."

She drummed her fingers on the table. "There are a couple of possibilities. Maybe she was trying to find out something from him. Or suppose it was revenge? The victim has to know, at the end, and see it coming, or there is no revenge. You follow me? She had to be in a position to tell him, and still do it, and get away with it I think Stedman was being fitted for an eventual 'suicide,' on the order of Purcell's, when you blundered in. Not necessarily that night, but sometime in the near future. You just presented her with the perfect opportunity to do it then. And with you for the goat, the suicide bit wasn't necessary."

"Nice crowd," I said. "I wonder what they do for an encore? But I like the revenge angle. That takes us right back to Danny Bullard and ties it in with Purcell. And that guy with her tonight could very well be Danny Bullard's brother."

She nodded. "Except for a couple of things. There's nothing to indicate she even *knew* Danny Bullard. Not so far, anyway. And somehow I just can't see her or this cold-blooded thug declaring war on two policemen merely because they killed him." She paused, and frowned. "Even if you conceded that *she* might, in case she was very much in love with him, the brother is definitely out. He hadn't even seen Danny for years, so far as anybody knows. Criminals may hate all police impartially, but I don't think they take a personal view of a thing like that; at least, not to the point of endangering themselves for revenge."

"I agree with you," I said. "It doesn't make sense, actually. But let's drop it for the moment and talk about something else. I've got to get out of here,

before I get you in serious trouble. Brannan warned me it could get awful rough on whoever was hiding me."

"Oh, Brannan's foot," she said. "You'll stay here till we solve this thing."

"I'm not sure we'll ever solve it now," I said wearily. "I'll never find her again." I lighted a cigarette and stood up to walk back and forth across the room. I had to step over books and maps. "What's all this research, anyway?"

"The battle of Shiloh," she said, tapping a pencil absently against her teeth. Then she jerked erect. "Oh, of all the stupid idiots—"

"What's the matter?"

"I just remembered where I ran across the name of that machine tool company. It was the other day in the library, when I was going through the back copies of the *Express,* looking up Purcell's suicide."

I whirled. "Did it have anything to do with Purcell?"

"No-o. That wasn't it," She bit her lip, concentrating.

I crushed out the cigarette. "Let's go over to the library and see if we can find it again."

She started to get up; then she glanced at her watch, and shook her head. "The library's been closed for nearly an hour."

"Well, we'll go in the morning, then."

"Oh, I could look it up tonight," she replied, still frowning. "I can always get into the morgue over at the *Express* building. *But what the devil was it?* It was only a small item on a back page, and I think it was a followup on some older story."

Then she snapped her fingers and got to her feet. I've got it! It was something about a robbery." She ran into the bedroom to get her coat.

"But why in God's name would anybody hold up a tool company?" I asked, helping her on with the coat.

"To steal a lathe?"

"No, no, of course not." She gestured impatiently. "The payroll was held up. You stay right here. I'll be back in less than an hour."

Ten

I paced the floor, smoking one cigarette after another. Just after eleven-thirty I heard her key in the door. She came in and closed it quickly, and I could see intense interest and excitement in her eyes. I took her coat.

“Don’t bother to hang it up,” she said. “Toss it here on a chair. I think we’re onto something.”

She shoved one of the hassocks up to the coffee table and sat down. Opening her purse, she took out two sheets of paper covered with notes. I knelt on the floor across from her and watched eagerly.

“It was held up?” I asked.

She nodded. “But that’s not it alone. There are really *two* stories, apparently not related at all. But if you struck them together in just the right way you might get a hell of an explosion. Listen—”

She consulted the notes. “On December twentieth of last year—that would be a little over two months ago—the payroll of the Shiloh Machine Tool Company was hijacked just as it was being delivered by the armored car company. It had all the earmarks of a professional job, very thoroughly studied and thought out—cased, I believe the term is. In the first place, it was the last payday before Christmas, and all the employees were getting a cash bonus. The whole thing came to a little over fourteen thousand dollars. The timing, and the exact method of delivery of the money, had apparently been studied for some time. There were two men involved in the actual holdup, and a third was driving the getaway car.

“But something did go wrong. A police car showed up unexpectedly just at the last moment, and one of the two gunmen was killed. They both wore masks, incidentally. The other one, and the driver of the car, got away clean. Along with the money, of course. The case has never been solved. They don’t know to this day who the two men were, and none of the money was ever recovered.”

”What about the one who was killed?” I asked. “Didn’t they identify him?”

She nodded. “Yes. But there was no lead at all to the other two. He was an out-of-town hoodlum, from Oakland, California, I think. As far as the police could find out, he’d never been in Sanport before, and didn’t have any connections here at all. His name was Al Collins and he had a record a mile long, but he might as well have been from the moon as far as identifying the other two was concerned.

“Of course, the police checked out all the Shiloh employees who worked in the accounting and payroll departments as a matter of routine, but found nothing. If the gunmen had got any information from inside, the fact was well hidden. So much for the first story.

“Late the following night—that would be Saturday night December twenty-first—a liquor store was held up in one of the suburban shopping centers. It was a routine sort of thing, one gunman, fifty- or sixty-dollar haul, nobody killed. The case was turned over to Purcell and Stedman, along with several others they were working on.

“The next day, the owner of the liquor store tentatively identified a photograph of Danny Bullard as the gunman who’d held him up. This wasn’t particularly surprising; he’d held up plenty of them and had served time in prison for at least one. Late that afternoon Stedman and Purcell got a tip from a stool pigeon as to where Bullard was living. It was an old apartment house in a run-down section of town on Mayberry Street. They went out to pick him up for questioning. He didn’t answer their knock, but they thought they heard him inside, so they broke down the door. He was trying to get out a window and turned with a gun in his hand, ready to open fire. They shot and killed him. They made out their report, there was the customary hearing, and they were completely exonerated. End of second story.” She glanced up at me. “You can see the possibilities now.”

I nodded. “Did they ever find out if Bullard actually did rob the liquor store?”

“The case was closed that way. After all, he had a record of liquor store robberies, and the owner was pretty sure of his identification.”

”Then if your guess is right,” I said, “there would be one person—and maybe two—who knew Bullard hadn’t held up any liquor store and that he

was just hiding out with fourteen-thousand from the Shiloh job; fourteen-thousand that hasn't showed up to this day."

"That's right," she replied. "And it goes a long way toward establishing the revenge motive. Justifiable killing in line of duty is one thing, but cold-blooded murder by two crooked cops for a pile of money is something else. But I'm inclined to think they might be wrong, about the killing, at least."

"It's possible," I agreed. "Their idea probably is that Purcell and Stedman found out about the Shiloh loot and deliberately fast-talked the liquor store man into an identification, for an excuse."

"That's right. But they'd have to be pretty gruesome to do it. It's more likely they didn't even know Bullard had anything to do with the Shiloh job until they found the money in the apartment after they'd already killed him for resisting arrest. The temptation was overpowering, it looked safe, so they risked it. They probably thought the third man was also an out-of-town import. And he probably was, except that he was Danny Bullard's brother."

"Yeah," I said. "And a cold-blooded goon who'd already killed two or three men. They picked a lovely spot to turn crooked."

She lighted a cigarette. "There's only one trouble with it, of course. And that is there's still not the slightest connection between Danny Bullard and Frances Celaya, as far as anybody knows. And remember, the police have checked it in both directions. They investigated the Shiloh employees for underworld connections after the holdup, and looked into Bullard's girl friends after Purcell's death."

"But there *has* to be," I said. I got up and walked across the room. "Jesus, if I could only have got into her apartment. I might have found a letter or something."

She looked thoughtful. "You're absolutely positive there was nothing else in her purse that might have the address?"

"No," I said. "Just the usual cosmetics and junk, and a pair of stockings she bought at Waldman's." I stopped. "Oh, sweet Jesus, how stupid can you get?"

"What is it?" she asked.

"There's a charge-a-plate in it and the sales slip for the stockings! She charged them, and I forgot all about it."

She came instantly alert. "Well, maybe we can find the purse."

I shook my head. "I don't think there's a chance."

“Think,” she ordered. “Try to remember about how far you ran, and in what direction, after you jumped out of the car.”

“Oh, that part’s easy,” I said. “It was only three blocks, and I could find it blindfolded from there. But I don’t know where I jumped out of the car. I was lying on the floor. I don’t know how long. Part of the time I may have been unconscious. All I can remember is that it was a little neighborhood business district, maybe two or three blocks long. There was a movie theater on one side of the street and a drugstore on the other, and a filling station down at the end of the block. There are probably a hundred little districts like that in the city.”

“Hah! And you’re supposed to be a navigator.” She grinned. Springing up, she went into her study and returned with a city map. She spread it out on the coffee table. “I’ll bet we can find it in thirty minutes. Now come around here so we’re on the same side.”

I moved over. “Look,” she said, “right here is where I picked you up. Octavia, in the 700 block. See? Now, which way did you approach Octavia?”

“Down this street,” I said, tracing it with my finger, four or five blocks.”

“All right. And did you turn into that street from the right, or left?”

“Hmmm—I made a right turn.”

She nodded. “Good. Then you were coming from this section. From the west. So let’s extend this line a short distance and leave it for the moment, then try from the other end. Do you remember what bus she took?”

“Wait—” I said. “I do. It was a number seven. And we got off at Stevens Street.”

“I think we’re in business,” she said. She went over to the telephone, looked up the number of the Transit Company, and called it.

“Could you tell me where your number seven line crosses Stevens?” She held on for a moment, and then nodded, “On Bedford? Thank you very much.”

She came back and sat down. Referring to the street index at the bottom of the map, she said, “Bedford Avenue—R-7. Hmmm. Here we are. You were going north on Bedford. Here’s Stevens.”

I ran a finger along the line. “And here’s the playground, three blocks from the bus stop. That’s where they jumped me.”

“Right,” she said. She made a mark there with her pencil. “You were put in the car there. And that’s south and west of Octavia Street. You approached Octavia from the west, so they were taking you in a generally northeasterly direction.” She extended the two lines until they intersected and drew a circle around them some fifteen or twenty blocks in diameter. “Now hand me the telephone directory again.”

I put it in front of her. She flipped through the yellow pages to Theaters. “Read them off, with the street addresses,” she said. “I know most of the downtown ones, so we can eliminate them and just concentrate on the neighborhood houses.”

It took about ten minutes. We wound up with two neighborhood movies whose street addresses fell inside the circle. “It’ll be one of those,” she said.

“Probably this one,” I said. “The Vincent, on Stacy Avenue. It’s nearer Octavia. I couldn’t have walked much over a mile.”

She stood up. “Let’s go get it.”

I put on my shirt, tie, and coat, and was just reaching for the topcoat when I stopped abruptly. “The key!” I said. “My God, I don’t know what I did with that. The address is no good if I can’t get in.”

I’d had it in my hand when he grabbed my topcoat. Had I held onto it? I shoved a hand into the right topcoat pocket and sighed. There it was. I must have dropped it in there while pretending I had a gun in it

“You still have it?” she asked.

“Yeah. I guess I’m getting tired.”

I went out first and she picked me up a block away. “Listen,” I said, “this time, if I get in trouble, run.”

She shook her head. “Relax. I’m getting the feel of this business of being a fugitive.”

Fifteen minutes later we turned off an arterial into Stacy Avenue. It was strictly residential here. We went straight up it for about ten blocks.

“That’s it,” I said excitedly. “Right ahead there.”

It was after midnight now, and the theater marquee was dark, as well as the big drugstore across the street, but the service station was still open down at this end of the block.

“Turn right at the corner beyond the drugstore,” I said. “Then it’s less than three blocks.”

She made the turn. The streets were deserted now, and nearly all the houses were dark. We went slowly past the mouth of the alley in the second block. “That’s it,” I said. “But go on for another block, and I’ll walk back.”

She crossed the next intersection and parked under some trees at the curb. She switched off the lights. I got out, softly closed the door, and walked back. When I reached the mouth of the alley there was no one in sight anywhere. I ducked in. It was on the left, about halfway to the other end, I thought. When I was almost there I could make out the gate, still open.

It was pitch dark inside the yard, but I could see the blacker mass of the oleanders in the corner. I slipped toward them and bumped into something. It was a garbage can. It fell over, the lid clattering. I froze, crouching beside the high board fence. A minute passed, and then two, but no lights came on in the house. I eased past the fallen can and reached into the oleanders. Kneeling, I pushed into them, groping with my hand. In a moment my fingers touched it. I slid it out, clamped it under my arm, and hurried to the car.

“Well, that was fast,” she said softly, as she pulled away from the curb. She turned, went back to Stacy Avenue, and swung left, toward the arterial.

I set the purse on the floor between my feet, and bent over it, flicking the cigarette lighter. Taking out the little bag containing the nylons, I extracted the sales slip. The imprint of the charge-a-plate was inked on it. *Frances. Celaya*, it said. *1910 Keller Street. Apt. 207.*

“Keller Street,” I said. “You know that one?”

“No,” she replied. “We’ll have to look it up on the map.”

I pulled it from the glove compartment and unfolded it. At that moment she made a turn into the arterial and pulled to the curb under a street light. We both bent over the map.

“Here we are,” she said quickly. “K-3.” She ran a finger out along the line and found it. “That’s in the same area as Randall Street. Only five or six blocks over.”

“Maybe we’ve got her this time,” I said. “But, God, I hope she’s lost that gorilla.” I put the map away.

She had lifted the purse onto the seat and was taking everything out of it. I checked the wallet. There were five or six dollar bills in it, but no other identification except a Social Security number. I was about to drop it back

into the purse when I noticed it had a zippered compartment in the back. I, opened it. At first glance it appeared to be empty, but then I saw a folded scrap of paper down in one corner. I fished it out and unfolded it. There was a telephone number penciled on it, and a girl's name. *GL 2-4378 Marilyn.*

"What is it?" she asked.

I showed it to her. It looked as if it had been in the wallet a long time. "Odd way to write it," she remarked. "With the number first."

It probably wasn't important, but I shrugged and dropped it in my coat pocket. "Nothing else?" I asked.

She shook her head and began replacing everything in the purse. "That seems to be it." She turned and dropped the purse in the back, and we pulled away from the curb.

I glanced at my watch. It was after one a.m. now. I was probably already too late. If I'd got the correct address the first time I might have made it to the apartment before they did, but now there was no telling what I'd run into. Would she have left town, or would she be waiting for me with that cold-blooded killer? I gave up. There was no way to guess what she would do.

It was a little nearer the downtown area than the Randall Street address, a run-down district of grimy apartment buildings and small stores, shadowy and empty at this time of night. 1910 was an old three-story brick. She drove slowly past. Only two or three of the windows showed any light.

"Go on around the corner," I said. She turned. We had to go on to the second block before we found a place to park. Apparently the tenants of the apartment buildings had to leave their cars out. She backed in and cut the lights.

"I shouldn't be over fifteen minutes," I said. "Be careful."

I got out and turned the coat collar up around my face. If I met a prowl car on these deserted streets I was almost certain to be recognized. They knew I'd lost the hat, and the tan topcoat and red hair had probably been burned into their minds with some real blow-torch profanity by now. I reached the corner of Keller and turned into it. There were no cars in sight at all. I stepped quickly into the dingy vestibule of 1910. A small bulb overhead cast enough light for me to see the row of name-plates beside the buttons. Number 207 was Frances Celaya, all right. I reached for it, but hesitated, and drew back my hand. If they were up there waiting for me,

they wouldn’t answer anyway, and all I’d accomplish would be to warn them. I took out the key and tried it. It worked. I opened the door and slipped inside, conscious of an empty, fluttery feeling in my stomach.

There was a dimly lighted hallway going straight back. The stairs were to the right. I slipped over to them and started up. They were carpeted with a threadbare runner, and my shoes made no sound on them. The upper hallway was the same as the one below, with two antique light fixtures in the ceiling and a single strip of carpeting down the center. It was intensely silent except for a man’s snoring somewhere beyond one of the doors. I looked at the numbers. 207 was straight back at the end of the hall.

I eased up to it and listened with my ear against the panel. There was no sound at all from inside. No light showed under the door. I slipped the key into the lock and turned it very gently until it came full over and stopped. With the other hand I turned the knob and pushed the door open about an inch. It was dark inside. I turned the key back, softly withdrew it, and dropped it in my pocket, conscious of my shallow breathing and the tightness of my nerves.

I pushed the door open a few more inches and felt inside along the wall with my hand. My fingers encountered a light switch, but I didn’t turn it on. I reached further. There was no one standing beside the door; not on this side, at least. I eased the door on open, slipped inside, and closed it very softly, turning the door knob and the knob of the lock with my fingers so they wouldn’t click.

For at least a full minute I stood perfectly still with my back against the door, listening. There was complete silence except for a slow dripping of water somewhere in another room. If there were anyone near me, he was breathing even more softly than I was. My eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness. Opposite me, at the back of the room, was a small window. It was curtained, but the material was thin enough to show faint light behind it, apparently coming from somewhere in the alley below.

I could make out a sofa against the wall at my right, and a chair and bridge lamp. There were the slightly darker oblongs of open doorways on either side at the back of the room. I moved cautiously toward the one on the right, feeling my way and easing my feet down very gently on the carpet. I reached it and listened. There was still no sound of breathing. Then

I saw the ghostly blur of something large and white, and realized it was a refrigerator and that this was the kitchen.

I turned and eased across the room to the other door. This should be the bedroom. There was no sound except that of the slowly dripping water, which was a little louder now and was somewhere off to my left. The bath must be at that end. At my right was another curtained window. I could just make out the pale oblong of the bed.

I took another step into the room, staring in the direction of the bed. I was certain now; there was no one on it. Sighing with relief, I flicked on my cigarette lighter. There was a small reading lamp on a stand beside the bed. I clicked it on and looked around. The place looked as if a band of monkeys had been playing in it.

Beyond the bed was a chest of drawers. The two top drawers were pulled about halfway out, and the rug before it was littered with pants, stockings, slips, and bras. Beyond the chest was a clothes closet. Two or three dresses still hung from the bar, but there were several on the floor, along with two empty suitcases and a cardboard box of books that had been dumped on the rug. To the left of the closet was the bathroom door. It was ajar, and I was conscious again of the sound of dripping water. To my left was a dresser. Its drawers were pulled open too, and handkerchiefs and costume jewelry and cosmetics were scattered across the top and on the floor in front of it. The place had been thoroughly ransacked by someone in a hurry. I turned quickly and went out in the living room. Nothing had been disturbed here. But then there was nothing to disturb—no desk or chest—only the dreary sofa and chairs of a cheap furnished apartment. I stepped over to the kitchen and clicked on the light. Everything appeared to be normal there.

I snapped the light off and started back to the bedroom, and then went rigid as the buzzer sounded. Somebody was at the door downstairs. It buzzed again, the noise rasping harshly across the silence. Then my nerves slowly uncoiled as I realized whoever it was couldn’t get in. He didn’t have a key, or he wouldn’t have rung for her to open the door. I waited. There was no further buzz. He’d apparently given up.

I stepped on into the bedroom, and looked at the mess again. Who had done it? Was somebody else on her trail? I wondered where she was; she wouldn’t have left town without packing at least some of her gear. I began

pawing through the dresser drawers. She must have old letters around somewhere, Christmas cards, photos, address book, diary, or something to give me an idea of the people she knew.

The dresser held not a scrap of paper of any kind. I even felt under the bottoms of the drawers the way they did in movies. Letters, letters—now where the hell would she keep old letters? I straightened and started to turn, looking futilely around the room. My gaze stopped suddenly and backed up and I gasped, feeling my scalp tingle.

The door of the bathroom was partly open, and from this side of the room I could see in past the edge of it. The light was poor, but there was no doubt that what I saw was the sloping end of. an old-fashioned bathtub, and hanging inertly from the edge of it a slender and very shapely leg. I reached the door in two strides, pushed it open, and snapped on the light. When I looked down into the tub I had to fight to keep from being sick.

She was lying on her back with her eyes open, staring up at me through about six inches of water with the long black hair floating around her face. Her head was almost under the spigots, one of which was dripping intermittently and shattering the surface to cause little patterns of distortion to play across her features. She was naked. The long legs slanted up the sloping end of the tub and hung over the edge, causing the leverage that was keeping the rest of her submerged. There were ugly bruises around her throat. I swallowed again and forced myself to reach out and touch her. The leg swung. She probably hadn’t been dead half an hour when I got here.

I groped for the light switch, got it turned off, and came out. This was the end of the trail. If she *had* killed Stedman, there was no way now it could ever be proved. I stood looking dumbly around at the mess he’d left. Searching it now would be utterly pointless; he’d already done that, just to be sure there was nothing left at all. I had to get out of here, fast, and keep going. I went over and switched off the light beside the bed. Just as I was groping my way through the door into the living room I heard voices outside in the hall.

Knuckles rapped on the door. “Miss Celaya!” a voice called out.

I stiffened up, afraid even to breathe.

The fist rapped again. “Open up in there,” the voice ordered. “Police.”

I moved somehow. Stepping softly across the rug, I parted the curtains at the window in the rear of the living room. There was no fire escape, no

back way out at all. If I jumped, I'd break both legs. A key was being inserted in the lock. I went straight ahead into the kitchen just as the front door opened.

Eleven

A switch clicked. Light streamed through the doorway beside me. I flattened against the wall on shaking legs.

“You’re sure she came in?” a voice asked.

“Yes, sir. About an hour ago. She’d lost her key and I had to give her another one.”

“Well, let’s take a look around.” This was still another voice.

There were three of them, apparently two policemen and the apartment house manager who’d let them in. They were moving now. It was the bedroom they’d be interested in, but one of them would check the kitchen. I could hear his footsteps approaching the door. I tried to open my mouth to call out to him not to shoot. It was too late now to show myself and surrender, and when I loomed on him suddenly, standing beside the door—No sound would come out. I couldn’t even speak. The footsteps were almost beside me now.

Then the other one called suddenly from the bedroom. “Hey! Look at this!”

The footsteps turned and retreated. I reached up and wiped the sweat off my face because it was stinging my eyes and peered around the door frame. An old man without a hat was standing just inside the bedroom, the other policeman was out of sight—probably over by the chest or dresser—and this one was just reaching the door. None of them were looking this way. I eased off the wall, tiptoed out, and started slipping toward the front door. The second cop had reached the bedroom door now and was looking in. I went on, walking on eggs.

I had less than ten feet to go. I fought the impulse to break into a run and stole a glance over my shoulder.

“Oh, good God!” The voice came from the back of the bedroom. The first cop had found her now. “Hey, Hoyt! Go call in. She’s been murdered!”

Hoyt said, “Okay,” and started to turn. I lunged toward the front door. I heard his breath suck in, and then the startled yell. “Foley!” I hurtled through the doorway, bent over, with my feet churning. “Stop! I’ll shoot!”

The gun crashed behind me, and at the front end of the hall a window pane exploded with a shower of glass. He shot again, and something tugged at the side of my topcoat, just under my left arm. It pulled me off stride. The stairs were only a few steps ahead of me and to the left. I dived, slid over onto them, rolled once, caught myself with a hand on the railing, and scrambled to my feet. I ran down three or more steps and jumped. I could hear their feet pounding down the hall above me. The glass front door was about twenty feet to my right. I made it and was pulling it open when the first one came into sight on the stairs. He shot. He hit the wood frame of the door right beside my face. Splinters flew out of it, and something stung my cheek. I was outside now. Their car was parked right in front of the door. I wheeled to the left and sped along the sidewalk. They came out behind me and one of them shot again. All the muscles in my back were drawn up in knots as I expected a slug to come tearing into me.

I reached the corner and cut left around it. There was no use trying to reach Suzy. They were too close behind me, and they’d get her too. Somewhere behind me the siren cut loose. One was still after me on foot while the other went around the block in the car to head me off. He’d use the car radio to call in, and the whole area would be surrounded in a few minutes. I heard the pounding footsteps come around the corner behind me. They stopped. He was going to shoot again. There were some trees along the sidewalk here, and I cut right and ran out into the street to put their trunks in the line of fire. He didn’t shoot.

Directly opposite me was the mouth of an alley. I sped into it. I couldn’t hear him any longer, but when I looked back he was still coming, about half a block away. Then I heard the siren up ahead? They had me bottled up. But the car went down the street past the mouth of the alley just before I came out. I crossed the street behind it and into a continuation of the alley in the next block. Just before I came out of it, I looked back again. He was no longer in sight. I emerged on the sidewalk. The street was deserted. But I could hear sirens. They were converging now from every direction.

My legs were weak and shaky now, and my side hurt badly. I fought to get my breath. It was useless; why not give myself up? They had me.

They'd throw a ring of cars and men around an area eight or ten blocks square and search it inch-by-inch. They wanted me so badly now they could taste it. I'd been eluding them for a week, and now I'd killed a girl. Nothing could ever save me from that one. I'd gone to Randall Street looking for her. And when they finally found me I was in her apartment and she'd just been murdered.

I quit trying to think and started running again, operating on pure instinct. I turned left. In the next block there was another alley. I ducked into it. Rubber screamed behind me as a car made a turn into the street I'd just left. Up ahead there were more sirens. It was shadowy in the alley, with lights only at the ends, but there was no place to hide. I stopped and collapsed beside some garbage cans, sobbing for breath.

I was behind a two-story commercial building of some kind. Directly above me was a fire escape ladder that terminated about eight or nine feet from the ground. I stood up and leaped for it, and caught the bottom rung. I held on for a second, heaved up, and caught the next one. In a minute I was far enough up to get my feet on the lower rungs. I went on up, slid over the wall, and dropped onto the roof. I looked back. No one had come into the alley yet. I could stay out of sight up here until they gave up, until tomorrow night if necessary, and then get out. Then I looked around, and my heart sank.

Adjoining the building on the left was an apartment house some two stories higher, and there were windows on this side. When daybreak came, somebody would see me down here. I looked the other way. The building on the right was also two stories higher than this one, and going up the side of it near the front was a steel ladder. I pushed myself up and went over to it, took one more deep breath, and started to climb. When I was halfway up I looked down and saw that anyone in the street could see me if he happened to look up. A police car was stopped at the corner and two men in uniform were getting out. I tried to run up the ladder. My knees were shaky, and my arms felt like lead. I almost missed a rung with one hand, and held on, sobbing for breath. Then I was at the top. I tumbled over the wall and fell onto the gravel of the roof. I lay there, too spent even to move, and listened to the baffled snarls of sirens in the street four stories down.

Then a voice said, right above me, "Hey, move your head, will you? You're on my ephemeris."

Maybe I was beginning to crack up. It was very dark, because of the four-foot wall around the edge of the roof that shut out the light from the streets. Then a flashlight came on, squarely in front of my face. It had red paper tied across the lens and made nothing but a faint glow. A hand came down and pushed my head a little to one side and slid something from under it. It seemed to be a pamphlet of some kind.

I drew in another shaky breath. “I’ve got a gun,” I said harshly. “You make one sound, and I’ll shoot!”

“Good,” the voice muttered absently. “That’s fine. Hmmm—here we are. Declination thirty-two forty-seven.” The light went out.

I rolled over and managed to push myself to a sitting position with my back against the wall. Then I could make out the three shadowy legs of a tripod. Above it was something like a section of stovepipe, slanted at an angle toward the sky, and sitting on a little bench to one side of it was the dark figure of a man. He was bundled up in a lot of clothes against the cold and was hunched over the lower end of the stovepipe with his eye against the side of it. I knew what it was then. It was a telescope, and he was an amateur astronomer.

“What are you watching?” I asked.

He made no reply. He made a slight adjustment to the mounting of the telescope and went on looking. “Fine,” he muttered.

He wasn’t going to call the police; it was doubtful he even knew I was here. He was out there among the light years. I took out a cigarette and lighted it.

“If you’ve got to flash lights, go somewhere else,” he said irritably.

”Sure,” I said. I had my wind back now. I pushed to my feet and walked over to the rear of the roof to look down in the alley. A police car was crawling slowly through it. I sat down with my back against the wall, trying to think. I’d got soaked with sweat while I was running, and now I was beginning to be cold. I shivered.

How much longer could this nightmare go on? And what was the point of it now? There had been some hope at first, as long as there was a chance I might find out who had killed Stedman, but now everything was blown up. Frances Celaya had killed him, without a doubt, but I not only didn’t know why or have the slightest bit of proof, but I was also wanted for killing her.

There was one other person involved in it, but I didn't have any lead to him at all except that he was as big as a horse and I thought he was a seaman. He'd taken care of that, all right. The only way to find out who he was had been through her, so he'd killed her and then made sure there was nothing in her apartment that could point to him in any way. He knew I had the purse with her identification in it and that I might eventually catch up with her. Or that sooner or later the police were going to catch up with me, and I just might sell them on the idea of at least investigating her. And there was always the possibility I might call the police. Then I stopped short.

That big drunk! The one who'd pushed open the door of the telephone booth! It was a thousand-to-one shot, but it would fit. Suppose he'd been following me, looking for a chance to kill me? But, wait. Where could he have picked up my trail? I'd lost him, along with the police, after I'd grabbed the purse. Then I saw it; it was absurdly simple. At her old Randall Street apartment house, of course.

He'd known there was a good chance I'd go for the address on the driver's license, and he'd driven over there and waited. I'd come out running, so he didn't have a chance to get me, but he'd followed us after I got in the car with Suzy. There'd been a car behind me in the street but I hadn't paid any attention to it because I could see it wasn't the police. He couldn't get me there at the phone booths because the place was right out in the open, well lighted, and populated with shoppers from the supermarket. All he had was a knife, and it might take several minutes to do the job. But he'd pretended to be drunk and opened the door to get a good look at me. And then he'd gone into the other booth to eavesdrop.

By God, that was it! I tried to remember the exact sequence of the conversation with Brannan. I'd told him about the big killer and my hunch he might be a seaman, but that was before the drunk had shown up. And after he had gone into the other booth I hadn't mentioned him at all. I'd simply said to Brannan, "How about spending a few minutes of your time trying to find the fugitive that *did* kill Stedman?" I'd even spelled her name and told him where she worked. It would have been obvious to anybody listening that I was talking to the police. I broke off and shuddered. I might as well have strangled her myself.

That was all right; I'd feel sorry about it some day when I had more time. She'd got me into this whole mess by killing Stedman and hanging it

on me, and then she'd tried to butcher me too. From where I sat, she had it coming to her, and the only thing wrong with it was the fact that now I was hopelessly saddled with Stedman's murder. And hers. I wished she could have lived long enough to do a little talking.

I sat up suddenly. I had to warn Suzy! That gorilla knew where she lived, and he might try to get her too. If he'd followed us from Randall Street to those phone booths, he must have tailed us all the way to the apartment. She was with me, so he would figure she was after him too. God, maybe it was already too late. And just how was I going to warn her? They had me treed like a raccoon on top of this building.

But maybe there was a pay phone in the building. Sometimes in cheap apartment houses where a lot of the tenants didn't have phones of their own there were pay phones in the corridor on each floor. I sprang up and strode over to the big man with his telescope. He still had his eye glued to it.

My eyes were well accustomed to the darkness now, and I could see him somewhat better. He appeared to be about forty, rather moon-faced, heavy-set, and wide across the shoulders, but soft-looking. He wore a cap, a scarf around his neck, and one of those he-mannish coats that sports car fanatics went in for, a three-quarter length affair with wooden dowels for buttons.

"Is there a pay phone anywhere in the building?" I asked.

He made no reply.

I reached down, caught him by the arms, and hauled him to his feet "Pay attention, friend," I said. "I'm talking to you."

He stared at me in surprise and outrage. "What's the matter with you? Can't you see I'm busy? If you want to look at Saturn, go bother somebody else. I'm studying the Cepheid variables."

I shook him. "Come back and join us for a minute. The planet I want to talk about is this one. Remember it? It has people on it. And they sometimes use things called telephones. Is there a pay phone down there in the corridors?"

"No," he said.

"Have you got one in your apartment?"

"I have not," he said irritably. "Now, will you please get out."

"Not yet," I said. "Peel off that bird-watchers' coat and hand it here. And the cap."

For the first time he looked slightly nervous. “Are you going to rob me?”

“No. I’m just trading coats with you. And since mine’s got a bullet hole in it I’ll give you twenty dollars to boot.”

“I never heard anything so ridiculous—”

“Get it off,” I said. “Or I’ll kick your telescope.”

He’d decided by now I was crazy, so he took it off and handed it to me, along with the cap. I handed him two tens and felt in the pockets of the gabardine for anything I’d left in them. I came out with a small, folded piece of paper. What—? Then I remembered. It was that girl’s name and telephone number I’d taken from Frances Celaya’s purse. I shrugged and dropped it in the pocket of my suit coat. He put on the gabardine, muttering to himself. “Twelve straight days of either clouds or turbulence, and then when you get one hour of good viewing—”

I put on his. The cap was slightly too large, but I could keep it on my head. He had sat down again, glued his eye to the telescope, and forgotten I even existed. I wondered if he was married. Well, it probably didn’t matter, I thought. The average wife might have a little trouble understanding how you could trade coats with somebody on the roof of a four-story building at two o’clock in the morning, but no doubt his had become accustomed to the fuzzier types of explanation. I didn’t really think anything of it at the time, dear. I was just sitting there studying the Cepheid variables, and this man came by—

I located the door and went down a flight of steps to the top floor. The corridors were poorly lighted and deserted. They were rather depressing with landlord-tan wallpaper and the smells of old cooking. I met no one at all. In the corridor on the ground floor, just inside the front door, there was a mirror hanging on the wall above a small table containing a potted plant of some kind. I stopped and checked myself. The coat and cap were fine, and I looked entirely different, but there was a scratch on my left cheek and a little streak of dried blood. I rubbed at it with a moistened forefinger and then my handkerchief, and got most of it off. I turned up the collar of the coat, tilted the cap at a careless angle, and sauntered out, feeling scared as hell. It might work or it might not, but I had to get to a phone, even if they caught me.

The streets were almost completely deserted. That made it even worse; anybody moving at all was conspicuous. There wasn't a police car in sight at the moment, however. I went up to the corner and turned left. Straight ahead about fifteen or twenty blocks I could see the tall buildings of the downtown area. If I could make it, that would be the easiest place to find a phone at this time in the morning.

I was crossing the intersection when I saw a squad car turn into the street about three blocks up. It stopped, the men in it apparently talking to the uniformed cop on the corner. Then it shot ahead, coming toward me. They'd seen me. The only way to do it was play it very cool, no matter how scared I was. If they actually stopped and asked me for identification, of course, I was done for, but they might not if I didn't show any nervousness. I went on at the same pace, stepped up on the curb, and paused to light a cigarette. They slowed, made the turn, and crawled past me on the other side of the street. I could feel the eyes on me. I glanced briefly in their direction, took a puff on the cigarette, and kept on. They went on past. I felt weak all over. They turned right at the next corner and disappeared.

I made a full block before I had to go through it again. This one was coming, toward me, along this side of the street. They saw me, came on faster, and then slowed. They were going to stop. Then their radio said something in a staccato burst of sound, and they shot ahead, cutting in the siren. When they were a few blocks away I stopped and listened. I could hear three sirens closing in on some place back there. I sighed. Somebody had probably reported a prowler, and now some of the heat was off me. I started walking faster. I was three blocks away and then five. After ten I stopped counting. I was out of the area now.

I crossed Pemberton Avenue, in the edge of downtown. The Greyhound bus terminal was only a block away on my right. The bars were all closed now, and that would be the nearest place with phone booths. Should I risk it? They had men watching it. But they'd never take a second look at me in this crazy sport coat. I was safer in a crowd, anyway, and the bus station always had people in it. I turned and hurried toward it.

Fifteen or twenty people were boredly reading papers or trying to sleep sitting up on the benches, and some more were drinking coffee at the lunch counter further back. The phone booths were to the left of the lunch counter. I stepped into the first one, dropped in a dime, and dialed. The phone rang.

And then again. After awhile I was conscious that I was counting the rings and that I was very scared. She'd helped me, and I may have got her killed.

I hung up. Now what? If I could get out there, I couldn't get in. If she were still out somewhere, there was no way I could warn her. But maybe she'd got bored and started on that vodka again. I'd wait a few minutes and try again.

Then I remembered that phone number I'd got from Frances Celaya's purse. I hauled it out of my pocket and looked at it. *GL 2-4378 Marilyn*. From the way the paper was creased, it had been in her purse for months, and I didn't see how it could have anything to do with Stedman, but this was all we had left so I might as well try it

I dropped in a dime, and dialed a number. A man answered.

"Is Marilyn there?" I asked. "Yeah, she's here," he replied.

I came alert; this might be something after all. "Could I speak to her, please?"

"What're you, a damn wise guy?" he snarled, and hung up.

I stared blankly at the receiver, and put it back on the hook. Maybe this was the way you cracked up; things just quit making any sense. No doubt it was perfectly logical—

I stopped, wondering how I could have been so stupid. I should have known it all the time. Ducking around to the side of the booth I grabbed the directory. I flipped to the yellow pages, found what I was looking for, and ran my finger down the telephone numbers of the watchmen's shacks on the Municipal docks.

Pier Five was GLenwood 2-4378. And Marilyn was a boat.

A shrimper or commercial fisherman, I thought. Pier Five was where they tied up. Now we were getting somewhere. Then I thought of Suzy again, with that cold uneasiness inside me. Before I went out I had to try once more. I dropped the book, and when I turned to go back in the booth I was looking directly at a man at this end of the lunch counter. He had a cup of coffee and a newspaper in front of him, but his eyes were on my face. Then he looked away and picked up his paper. His face was vaguely familiar, and a little whisper of warning ran along my nerves. But, hell, nobody would recognize me in this sporty outfit. I entered the booth and dialed Suzy's number. The phone rang and went on ringing, but there was no answer. The fear grew worse. I turned my head, and the man at the

counter was looking toward the booth with a thoughtful expression on his face. I recognized him now. He was a detective, one of Stedman’s friends I’d seen several times at Red Lanigan’s bar.

Twelve

I turned back and went on listening to the futile ringing of the phone in the apartment while I tried to think. I just couldn't take much more of it; pretty soon I was going to crack and start gibbering.

Maybe he still hadn't recognized me, and I might make it. There was a cab stand at the Pemberton Avenue entrance. I hung up, reached for a cigarette, and was putting it in my mouth as I came out of the booth. I didn't look toward him. Turning, I sauntered casually toward the entrance, pausing for a moment to look over the rack of paperback books at the newsstand as I lighted the cigarette. There was no way to tell whether he'd got up or not; looking back would be like waving a sign. I went on, waiting for the voice behind me. I reached the door. There was one cab in the taxi zone, and the driver was behind the wheel. Just as I turned and started up toward it, I glanced back through the window. He had got up, and he was coming. He signaled to somebody on one of the benches and began to walk faster.

I yanked open the door of the cab and leaped in. "Pier Nineteen," I said.

"Yes, sir," he said. He pushed the flag down and hit the starter. We pulled away from the curb. The two detectives emerged from the doorway, running now, and turned up the sidewalk after us. They shouted at the driver. He saw them in the mirror.

"Friends of yours?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Probably a couple of drunks. Keep going."

We were a block ahead of them and gathering speed. I saw them turn and start back to the station, still running. There was no police car in sight, but the cab's number would be on the air within seconds now. In the deserted streets at three a.m. we weren't going to get far before they picked us up. I took two dollar bills from my wallet and held them in my hand.

We turned right on Walker and headed downtown. We passed a patrol car going in the other direction. It paid no attention to us. The lights were all blinking amber along Walker and we didn't have, to stop. Ten blocks

ahead we swung left into Western Avenue and were headed for the ship channel and waterfront, less than twp miles away now. We met another cruising patrol car. It went on past. I watched it. We were about eight blocks away when I saw it suddenly make a U-turn in the middle of the block. It came toward us, gathering speed.

“Turn right at the next corner,” I told the driver.

“But—”

“I said turn right.”

There was no siren yet, but they were closing on us fast. We made the turn. “Stop!” I told him. He knew something was wrong and slammed on the brakes. I dropped the two dollar bills on his lap and was out before the car stopped moving. “Get going!” I told him. He went on.

I lunged across the sidewalk and jumped into a shadowy area between two buildings, out of range of the street light. The police car made the turn on screaming rubber and went past. The taxi was about three blocks away. I cut across the street directly behind the police car, headed diagonally up toward the next corner and ran as fast as I could. Just as I reached the corner and turned down the intersecting street I heard the siren cut loose. They’d been chasing it so far merely because it was the same type of cab as that on the broadcast and they wanted to check the number, but now they’d got that in their headlights. They’d be back here in less than a minute. I reached the next corner and turned right. I was one block over now and parallel to the street they were on.

It was an industrial area, not far from Denton Street, and probably half a mile or less from the railroad yards. It was deserted this time of morning, and shadowy between the widely spaced street lamps. I reached a big warehouse on the next corner and stopped to look up the intersecting street. The patrol car shot past up in the next block, running without the siren. I ran straight ahead, across the intersection, and went on, driving hard. My only chance lay in getting as far from that place as possible before the other cars began pouring into the area. Two blocks further on, I turned left again, toward the railroad yards and the ship channel. I could hear the sirens now. They were something that would haunt my dreams for years—if I lived that long.

Two more blocks and I knew I couldn’t run any further without rest. Across the street was a vacant lot piled high with big sections of sewer pipe.

I ran over, ducked in between two stacks, and lay down in the weeds behind them. It was very dark. I rolled over on my left side, because of the pain in my right, pillowed my head on my arm, and struggled for breath. I heard a car go past the corner on whining tires, but paid no attention. There'd been too much of it, and I didn't even feel anything any more; I just avoided them mechanically, like an animal that has been trained to perform a trick at the correct signal. I wanted to reach the *Marilyn,* but after that I didn't care. If I found out nothing there, I was going to quit running.

I started thinking about Suzy and kept seeing her lying on the floor beside the door in the living room, killed by that cold-blooded thug. It would be so easy for him; all he'd have to do was knock, and she'd open because she would think it was me. I tried to shake it off. She was probably all right. There must be plenty of reasons she hadn't answered the phone. I couldn't think of any then, though.

But worrying about it now wasn't going to do any good. And I had a long way to go to get to Pier Five. I tried to orient myself. Pier Nineteen was at the end of Walker Avenue, but I was considerably south of Walker now and should be somewhere opposite Pier Ten or Twelve. If I turned right when I hit the railroad yards and went on another half a mile or mile it would put me pretty close to Pier Five. It was going to be hazardous all the way. They would probably reason that the address I'd given the driver was phony, but they'd search the whole waterfront, since we'd been headed that way. I flicked on the cigarette lighter briefly and looked at my watch. It was three-twenty. In another fifteen minutes I got up and went on. I was very tired. In the seven blocks to the rail-yards I had two close calls. Once a police car turned to the street less than a block behind me, and I barely made it under a warehouse loading platform before its lights could hit me.

* * *

It was four-ten. I snapped the lighter off and was in darkness again between the two rows of freight cars. Somewhere behind me a switch engine was working. I knelt and peered beneath the trucks of one of the cars. Beyond me was the quiet street, and the dark shed of a pier still slightly to the right of where I was, and in back of the shed a shadowy jungle of masts and drying shrimp nets. I couldn't see the pier entrance or the number, but it

should be the one. I walked down another dozen cars and climbed up on the coupling between two of them.

It was Pier Five. I could see the pool of light at the entrance to the shed, and the watchman leaning back in a chair reading a magazine in front of his little office just inside the doorway. There was no way to get on or off the pier without going past him, but they didn't require a pass on most of them. I searched the street in both directions and was about to hop down from between the cars when I saw a police car coming from the right. It stopped at the watchman's office of the boat repair yard that was the next pier beyond Five. The men in it were talking to the watchman. Then it came on up to Pier Five. They called the watchman out and talked to him. I began to catch on. They were looking for me, probably, and giving my description to the watchmen at all the piers. They passed the next one, which was not in use, and went on to Pier Seven where they did the same thing.

It could be something else, of course, but I couldn't take a chance on it. I had to stop and tell the watchman what I wanted and what boat I wanted to board, and if he had my description the police would be there before I could even get to the outer end. I cursed wearily. Now what?

I'd never find a way to do it from here. I went back to the left for another fifty yards to where the watchman couldn't see me crossing the street, and hurried over when there were no cars in sight. I stood in the shadows in front of Pier Six and stared across the slip. Pier Five ran out for some two-hundred feet, with a long T-head at the outer end. There were perhaps a dozen boats moored to it. They were nearly all shrimp boats. But there was no way around the big packing and icing shed at the landward end.

A car went past in the street. I moved back up against the wall to merge with the shadows. A derrick barge was mooring in the end of the slip, its deck about six feet below where I was standing. I looked down. The light was poor, but I thought I saw a small work boat in the water beside it. I eased along the edge of the slip until I found a ladder going down. In a moment I was standing on the deck. Apparently there was no one on board. I slipped around to the outboard side of the deck house. There was the work boat. I pulled it alongside with its painter. There was one oar in it.

Stepping down in it, I cast off the painter and sculled it over to the shadows alongside Pier Six, turned, and headed outward, keeping near the

piling. When I reached the end of the pier, I was beyond the outer limits of the illumination from the street lights. The tide was ebbing slowly, and I let it carry me down toward the T-head of Pier Five. There was one light-standard in the center of it, and the outer ends were in semi-darkness. None of the boats carried any lights at all. As I neared them I began trying to make out the names. I was in luck. *Marilyn* was the first boat along the inner side of the T-head. She was moored port-side to, with her stern toward me. I could just make out the lettering in the shadows: MARILYN OF SANPORT. I drifted in under her quarter, caught her rudder post, and handed myself along her starboard side in the work boat. She wasn't a shrimper; they all look approximately alike, no matter where you meet them. *Marilyn* was a sea-going monstrosity, an old two-masted schooner that had apparently been converted to power. Her masts were cut off and they'd added a midships house that looked like a chicken coop. Probably a snapper fisherman, I thought. Even in the semi-darkness out here at the end of the pier you could tell she was dirty and sloppily kept up. She reeked of fish, and apparently she hadn't been scrubbed down since discharging her catch. I passed a cardboard carton of rotting garbage lying on deck. She showed no lights anywhere, and I couldn't hear anyone aboard. I made the painter fast, and stepped lightly up onto her deck.

I was just forward of the midships house. Opposite me a plank led up onto the shadowy bulk of the pier. It was intensely silent. Somewhere beyond the railroad yards a siren wailed, and it made me shiver. I started aft, feeling my way cautiously along the starboard side. Just as I came into the darker shadows of the midships house I stepped on a body. The body stirred, scattering empty beer cans that rolled along the deck, muttered a drunken curse, and went back to sleep.

I ducked down in the shadows and crouched, absolutely motionless, until the beer cans stopped their clatter. No one called out. He must be the only one aboard, unless they were all passed out. He had the watch, I thought sardonically, tossing six or eight beer cans over the side so I wouldn't start them rolling again. I waited another minute, stepped over him, and went on aft. The crew's quarters should be back here.

There was a companion ladder going below. I stepped softly onto it and groped my way down. I reached the bottom, and stood perfectly still, listening for the sound of breathing. There was utter silence. It was as dark

as the inside of a coal mine, and the air was stale and foul with the odor of dirty clothes and old damp wood. I flicked on the cigarette lighter and looked swiftly around. The place was deserted. It was a small and dirty fo'c'sle with bunks on each side and some steel lockers against the forward bulkhead. I looked around for a light of some kind. On the forward bulkhead near the lockers was a kerosene lamp mounted in gimbals. I stepped over and lighted it. It cast a very weak yellow glow across the room.

There were eight bunks, but only five of them held mattresses. The deck was littered with cigarette butts and two or three pairs of sea-boots kicked partly out of the way under the lower bunks. Oil-skins dangled from the after bulkhead. Over most of the bunks were pin-ups clipped from girlie magazines. Two of the uppers which didn't have mattresses were loaded with seabags and beat-up old suitcases. There was a new plastic suitcase in one of the lower bunks.

I grabbed down one of the seabags, dumped its contents on the mattress of one of the bunks, and pawed through the stuff. It was all clothing. I repacked it and searched another, with the same negative results. Next I hauled down one of the old suitcases and opened it. It held more clothing, some shaving gear, a few old magazines, some contraceptives, and a deck of cards, but no letters or photographs or identification of any kind.

The next one was no more profitable, except that it did contain a savings account passbook made out to a Raoul Sanchez. In the third I found a packet of letters in a girl's handwriting addressed to Karl Bjornsen. I sighed wearily and replaced them all on the upper bunk. There was nothing left now except the new plastic job, and I had a hunch it would be locked. It was.

I cast about for something with which to jimmy it open. I saw nothing that would do, but then remembered I still hadn't searched the lockers. I went over and began pulling them open. They held more foul-weather gear —shoes, stacks of magazines and paperback books, and a couple of half-empty bottles of rum. But lying in the bottom of one of them was a large screwdriver and a marlinespike.

I grabbed up the marlinespike and attached the lock on the suitcase, inserting the point and prying upward. It was tough, but after a couple of minutes it gave up and flew open. I felt a little flutter of excitement as I

looked in; this one seemed more promising. Right on top, wrapped in a silk scarf, was a German Luger. Beside it was a whole deck of filthy pictures, held together by a rubber band, and three letters postmarked Havana, Cuba, and addressed in a feminine hand to Sr. Ernie Boyle. Under them was a photograph of a man and a girl at a table in a sidewalk cafe. There was something vaguely familiar about the man. I was just lifting it out for a closer look when I tensed up, listening. Somebody had come aboard. I heard his footsteps as he walked aft along the deck above me. I crossed to the lamp in two quick strides, and blew it out.

The beam of a flashlight probed downward from the deck, splashing against the steps of the companion ladder. I leaned back against the bunks on the starboard side. He came on down the ladder. I could see nothing but the big black shoes and the light, pointed downward. He stopped at the bottom, some twelve feet from where I was standing and started to raise the light. It swept along the bunks on the port side and then came abruptly to a stop when it hit the jimmied suitcase. I could hear his breath suck in. *"Ladrones!"* he said, and began to curse in Spanish. The light swung and splashed against my face.

I dived for him, but the light blinded me, and he was too far away. When I got there I met nothing but a fist, which crashed just under my ear, and the railing of the companion ladder. I plowed into the railing with my left shoulder and for a moment my whole arm went numb. I fell back against the bulkhead, straightened, and reached out for him. The light splashed against my face again, and at the same time the fist smashed against my jaw. I fell forward this time, grappling wildly with my arms, and caught him by the shirt. It tore. I swung and managed to hit him on the side of the face, but I was off balance and there was no power behind it. Then the light swung in a short, chopping arc, something smashed against my head, and I fell.

A whole ocean of pain was sloshing around in my head, and when I tried to move, something was holding me and somebody was tugging at my feet. I opened my eyes. There was light in the room now; the kerosene lamp was burning again. I was lying on my right side in one of the bunks with my arms twisted behind me. My hands were tied. I looked down at my feet.

He was a big Mexican or Cuban kid of twenty-two or so, dressed in a leather jacket and dungarees. He was muttering to himself in Spanish and

tying my feet to the stanchion of the bunk. He had broad shoulders and a square and rather pleasant face, but when he looked at me his eyes were filled with nothing but anger and contempt.

"Ladron!" he spat at me.

"You speak English?" I asked.

He checked the knots in the line, and straightened. "Sure, I speak English, Jack. And how low can you get? Coming on a pot like this to steal from the crew."

"I didn't come here to steal," I said.

"Of course not," he said contemptuously, and turned away. He started up the companionway: "Where are you going?" I asked.

"Where else?" he said. "Out to the phone to call the cops."

Thirteen

Listen,” I said quickly. “Wait a minute, will you? I tell you, I didn’t come here to steal anything.”

“You think I’m that stupid?” he asked. But he did pause.

“No,” I said. “I don’t. And if you’ll just think about it or a minute you’ll see I’m telling the truth. Why the hell would I waste time breaking the suitcase open? I’d just carry it off.”

He snorted. “Past the guard out there?”

“I’ve got a boat tied up alongside. I could have had all your suitcases off here thirty minutes ago if I’d wanted them.”

He made no reply. He went on up the ladder and I heard his footsteps going forward along the deck. Well, I’d tried. Then, miraculously, he was coming back. He stepped down the ladder and stood looking thoughtfully at me.

“So you don’t steal suitcases. Just work boats,” he said. “Go ahead and make me cry.”

“I’m going to put the boat back,” I said. “And I was going to leave the money here to pay for the suitcase—if I didn’t find what I was hoping to. The money’s in my left hip pocket.”

He lighted a cigarette. “And what was it you wanted?”

“I’m trying to find a man named Ryan Bullard.”

“And you thought he might be in that suitcase?”

“That’s right,” I said.

“You wouldn’t be short a few of your marbles, would you?”

“No. I mean it,” I said. “As a matter of fact, I think he is in there. There’s a photograph—but never mind. There’s nobody on here named Bullard?”

“No.”

“Then he may be using another name. Or the guy I’m looking for may not be Bullard at all, but I still want him. Is there a big joker about six-three

or six-four, heavy all the way up and down, black eyes, flat nose, mostly bald, with a fringe of black hair?”

He nodded. “That’s Ernie Boyle.”

I felt the stirrings of excitement. Maybe I was getting somewhere at last. “He’s the one I’m after.”

“Then you *must* be crazy, Jack. I mean like crazy crazy. You better let me call those cops. If I’d broke open his suitcase, I’d be screamin’ for ‘em.”

“I know what he’s like,” I said. “I’ve already run into him once tonight. But with the trouble I’m in, anything Boyle does to me is just a short-cut.”

“Who are you, anyway? And why did you come out here in a boat?”

“I’m Foley,” I said.

His eyes widened. “Oh. That tanker third mate that killed the cop.”

“I didn’t kill the cop.” I explained about the fight and how I’d left Stedman’s apartment. It was impossible to tell what he thought of it.

“And you think it was Boyle?”

“I think he had something to do with it.”

“Wait a minute, Foley. When was this cop killed? It was about a week ago, wasn’t it?”

“Last Tuesday.”

“Uh-uh. That’s what I thought. We didn’t even get in port till Friday.”

I’d been afraid of that. “And he was aboard last trip?”

“Yeah. And Tuesday we’d still be on the Campeche Bank, about four hundred miles from here.”

“I didn’t say he *did* it,” I said. “I know who that was. But I think he had something to do with it. Did you ever hear him mention the name Frances Celaya?”

“No-o. It’s new to me.”

“How about the name Danny?”

“No dice.”

“What’s yours?” I asked. “Raoul Sanchez.”

“All right, listen, Raoul—” I told him about the ambush by the playground and about Frances Celaya’s being killed. “This guy Boyle is mixed up in it some way and I’ve got to find out how. There may be something in that suitcase. So how about untying me?”

“Sure. That’d be great. And when he gets back I’m sitting here watching while you go through his gear? So he’ll kill both of us instead of just you?

Try again.”

“Cut it out,” I said. “When he starts down the ladder, jump me and fake a fight. Say you just got here and caught me.”

He thought about it for a moment. Then he shrugged and began loosening the knots. “All right, but don’t try anything, Foley. I can take you, any day in the week. I was a pro for a couple of years.”

“Thanks,” I said. I sat up and moved my arms. “Then you must figure this Boyle is a wrong one yourself?”

He sat down in one of the bunks and crushed out his cigarette in a sardine can ashtray. “Maybe. But I don’t bother him.”

I strode over to the suitcase in the opposite bunk. Picking up the Luger, I checked to see if it was loaded. It wasn’t. I started to turn, still holding it in my hand, but paused when I saw the expression on his face.

There was anger in it and chagrin. “Pretty cute trick, *ladron*. And I went for it like a sucker, huh?”

I caught on then. “Here,” I said, and grinned. I tossed the Luger to him. He caught it, staring at me unbelievingly.

“It’s not loaded,” I said. “But if you hear Boyle coming, point it at me. Say you just got here and took it away from me.”

“Hmmm,” he said. “I guess you’re really telling the truth, Foley. But you’d better see if you can find some ammunition and load this thing, and keep it yourself. That’s the only thing that’ll save you if he comes back.”

“I don’t want to have to shoot him,” I said. “He may be the only person in the world who knows I didn’t kill that cop. As long as he’s alive there’s one chance in a million he might talk. But if he’s dead—” I turned back to the suitcase again.

The photograph was first. The man in it was definitely familiar, but the girl was somebody I’d never seen before. She was Latin and very pretty, but she wasn’t Frances Celaya. I passed it to Sanchez. “Is that Boyle?”

He nodded. “Yeah. But it must have been made several years ago. When he still had most of his hair.”

“That’s what I thought,” I said. “And it’s the same guy that opened the phone booth to get a look at my face. Where would you say it was taken? Havana?”

“It could be,” he said. “Or it might be Vera Cruz. They have cafes like that too.”

“Did Boyle ever talk about Cuba?”

He shook his head. “Boyle never talks much about anything. But he speaks Spanish like a whiz, I know that.”

It all added up a little at a time, I thought. Bullard was supposed to have done time in a Cuban prison. I went on ransacking the suitcase. The filthy pictures I disregarded; Havana wasn’t the only place you could buy those. In another envelope I found three small photographs of a boat. There were no people in the pictures, and nothing written on the back to indicate where they had been taken, or when. It was a sailboat with a ketch rig, apparently forty to fifty feet long.

And that was all. There was nothing else beside the usual clothing and toilet articles. I went through it again, just to be sure, and even investigated the pockets in the clothing and checked to see if the bag had a false bottom or hidden compartments. There wasn’t even any ammunition for the gun.

Nothing remained except the three letters. I looked at the envelopes. Two of them were postmarked last October and the third in November. All three had been addressed to Sr. Ernie Boyle in care of a Señora Jiminez in Ybor City, Florida, but the last one had been forwarded from there to Boyle on the *Marilyn* in care of the Tinsley Seafood Packing Co. of Sanport. I slid out the first letter. It was written in Spanish in a none too legible hand. I’d had one year of the language in high school, but I’d forgotten what little of it I’d ever learned, and combined with the poor script it was hopeless. I checked the other two. They were the same. The only thing I learned was that they were all from the same girl. She signed herself Cecilia.

Then I shook my head, and wondered how stupid I could get. I handed them across to Sanchez. “Will you read these letters and tell me what they say? I can’t read Spanish.”

He grinned. “This’ll kill you, Foley. Neither can I.”

“What?”

”Oh, I can puzzle out a word of it here and there. That’s all.”

“Are you kidding? You speak it.” I stopped then, a little awkwardly. It just hadn’t occurred to me he might be illiterate.

He caught the hesitation and smiled again. “Oh, I can read and write. English. You see, my people came from Mexico and they spoke Spanish at home, but I was born in Corpus Christi and went to school there. So I spoke it, but never did learn to read it.”

“Oh,” I said. That seemed to be that. “I could probably get a few words of it,” he said. “But—”

“But what?”

“I don’t like the idea of reading a shipmate’s mail. That’s on top of the fact that if he caught me he’d kill us both.”

“I’m a seaman myself,” I said. “And I don’t like prowling through other peoples’ gear. But this is not just any shipmate. The cold-blooded sonofabitch drowned a girl in a bathtub about four hours ago. I’m positive he helped kill a policeman named Purcell. And if he’s the guy I think he is, he beat a seaman to death with a baseball bat about five years ago. So let’s don’t be too squeamish.”

“All right,” he said.

He slid the letters out one at a time, and went through them, frowning. It was intensely silent except for some bugs batting themselves against the chimney of the kerosene lamp. I looked uneasily around until I located the marlinespike; it was right beside the jimmied suitcase. Even with that, my chances of getting out of here alive were going to be very slim if Boyle showed up. He had the knife, he probably outweighed me about fifty pounds, and he was more or less a professional in the business of killing people.

Sanchez shoved the last letter back in its envelope and handed them to me. “I don’t get much of it,” he said. “They’re love letters and probably pretty hot stuff, but you wouldn’t be interested in that. Two or three times she says something about when he gets the money. I don’t know what money, or where he’s supposed to get it, but I think they’re going to buy a boat with it.”

”There are some pictures of a boat in his gear,” I said. “That could be it.”

He nodded. “Anyway, she mentioned it several times.”

“Any names?” I asked.

“Just this Mrs. Jiminez. And once somebody named Frances.”

I glanced up quickly. “Frances? Any last name?”

He shook his head. “No. Just Frances. I got the idea she meant somebody in Ybor City. That’s part of Tampa, you know. Lots of Cubans there.”

“I know,” I said. “How long has Boyle been on here, do you know?”

“Let’s see. He joined up in Tampa, about last September, I think. It was in the hurricane season, anyway. We had to run back and wait one out in Mobile the first trip he was aboard.”

“You were taking the catch into Tampa then?”

“Yeah. And sometimes Pensacola.”

“How long have you been running into Sanport?”

“Since the latter part of November, I think.”

“Did anybody ever come aboard to see Boyle when you were tied up here?”

“No. Not that I know of, Foley.”

“Has he taken a trip off since he joined her?”

“No. Been on here all the time.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. “Do you keep any kind of log book?”

He nodded. “Sure. We enter the catch every day. And our position—when we know it.” He grinned, the white teeth flashing. “We’re not like you guys, sextants, Loran, RDF’s, fathometers, and all that stuff. We navigate with a hand lead.”

“Can we look at the log?”

“Sure.” He went up the companion ladder, and I heard him going forward. He returned in a moment with a beat-up old ledger.

“Check back and see where the *Marilyn* was on December twentieth,” I said.

He flipped backward through the pages and moved over closer to the lamp. “Hmmm. Here in Sanport. We docked on the seventeenth, and sailed on the twenty-first. Seven a.m.”

I nodded. “Good. Now, January, twenty-eighth.”

He riffled some more pages.. “Here we are. Sanport Arrived here on the twenty-seventh. Sailed the thirtieth.”

So he was here when the Shiloh outfit was held up and again when Purcell committed suicide—or was killed. But it didn’t prove anything at all. Over half a million other people were also here at the same time.

“Thanks,” I said to Sanchez. He went back up the ladder with the log book. I picked up one of the letters and stared at it, trying to force my mind to remember some Spanish I’d had ten years ago. There must be something here. I heard Sanchez coming back along the deck, and then his shoes on the ladder.

“Just can’t stop bein’ nosy, can you, mate?”

I turned. It wasn’t Sanchez. Boyle was standing at the bottom of the ladder, seeming to fill it from one handrail to the other with enormous shoulders inside the dirty gray sweater. He had a loose-lipped grin on his face as he pulled the knife from his pocket and clicked it open. I picked up the marlinespike. He leaned against the ladder watching me coolly with the small black eyes. There wasn’t even any animosity. It was just a job he had to do. I swung the marlinespike against the base of the lamp chimney, and the fo’c’sle was plunged into total blackness.

I waited tensely, listening for any scraping of shoes against the deck. The silence went on. Then he spoke softly, still by the ladder. “Only way out’s over here, tanker sailor. Come and get it.”

I said nothing. It was impossible to see anything at all; it was a blackness like the end of the world. There was no point in talking just to let him know where I was. I knew where he was and where he was going to be all the time: between me and that ladder.

If I only had something to throw. Not the marlinespike, I thought. I had to hang onto that as long as I could; it represented the one slim chance I had for survival. The Luger! Sanchez had left it in the bunk where he was sitting. I tried to visualize it in the darkness, and moved one soft step to the left and forward, and put out a hand. I touched the railing of the bunk, slid my hand over onto the mattress, and moved it in a slow arc. How much longer would he wait? He knew he could come straight back and I couldn’t get past him in the narrow quarters without touching him somewhere. But he wanted to hear me cry out, or beg. My fingers touched the Luger. I pulled it toward me, transferred the marlinespike to my left hand, and picked it up in my right. I stepped softly back. There was still no sound from Boyle.

I touched the railing of the upper bunk on my left with my fingertips to be sure I was in the center of the fo’c’sle. He should be straight ahead of me, a little over twelve feet away. But maybe he was kneeling. I clamped the Luger under my left arm for a moment, reached into my pocket with my right hand and drew out two dimes. I tossed them, aft and a little to the right. They tinkled against the bulkhead to one side of him.

There was no sound of movement, but he laughed. “Mate, you didn’t think I’d fall for that stupid trick, did you?”

I grabbed the Luger in my right, leaned back, and slammed it forward as hard as I could throw, straight at the sound of his voice. There was a sickening sound of impact and something brittle and sharp like breaking bone, and he cried out in pain and rage. The knife clattered on the deck, and I heard him collapse against the ladder.

I rushed forward, swinging the marlinespike. It rang against the handrail of the ladder. I drew it back and swung it again, straight down, and felt it hit him. An arm encircled my legs, and he laughed. It was a terrible sound, bubbling and full of gravel, as if he had blood and broken teeth in his mouth. He heaved upward. I left the deck and crashed over backward, feeling the weight of him as he surged after me. I slashed at him with the marlinespike. It hit him. I put out a hand to find his head so I could hit him where it counted and I felt the hand slide as it came up against the bloody mess of his face, and I swung the steel again and again. A big hand caught my wrist and twisted, and the spike slipped out of my grasp. It rolled away in its crazy circle in the darkness.

Now neither of us had a weapon. I wondered what I could do to him with my bare hands when I couldn't even hurt him with a solid steel bar. A big fist crashed against the side of my face, and lights exploded in back of my eyes. I rolled, trying to get away from him, and kicked at him with my feet. And then, miraculously, I wasn't in contact with him anywhere. We were separated and lost from each other in impenetrable darkness like two eyeless and primitive forms of life circling in combat in the ooze at the bottom of the sea. I didn't know where he was nor where I was myself. All sense of direction was lost.

I knelt, absolutely motionless, and tried to quiet the tortured sound of my breathing. My ribs were pressed against the rail of a bunk, but there was no way to tell whether it was a starboard bunk and I was facing forward, or a port bunk and I was facing aft. I held my breath and listened for him but could hear nothing for the pounding of blood in my ears. He would try to stay between me and the ladder, but he didn't know where he was either. For some reason, I thought of Suzy Patton. He had probably killed her. I was filled with rage and wanted to get my hands on him. That was insane, and I knew it; the only way I'd ever get out of here alive was to stay away from him until I could find the ladder. I couldn't fight him. He was like a

gorilla; he could kill me with his hands as easily as he'd killed Frances Celaya.

Then I heard something. It was a hollow, tinny sound, and I knew he'd brushed against one of the lockers or bumped it with a shoe. He was completely away from the ladder, at the forward end of the foc'sle. The sound had come from my left, so I stood up and started to move softly in the opposite direction. I put out a hand and touched one of the railings of the ladder. Then he hit me. I fell against the steel steps with his weight on top of me. He was trying to get his hands on my throat. I pushed up with my arms and legs and we fell backward off the ladder and rolled. We crashed into the stanchion of one tier of bunks and it gave way and mattresses spilled down on top of us. I twisted from under him and then I was across his back with both arms locked around his neck. I pulled back. He came up to his knees, carrying me with him, and then to his feet. I tightened my grip and he lurched sidewise and fell, and we plowed headlong into the row of sheet metal lockers. They came adrift and fell over on us.

He broke my grip around his neck and threw me off him. The lockers rattled and crashed as we fought our way out from under them. A fist caught me on the jaw and slammed me back against the bulkhead. It dazed me. I tried to get up and fell over one of the lockers. He caught me and slammed my head back against the bulkhead. One of the big hands tightened around my throat. I was strangling and beginning to lose consciousness. I thought I heard somebody running along the deck above us.

The beams of flashlights stabbed downward from the deck, and men were coming down the ladder. Boyle released me and sprang up. I pushed myself up to my knees, and swayed, just in time to see him lunge for something shining in the lights that splashed on the deck near us. It was the marlinespike.

"Police!" a voice barked. "Stay right where you are!"

Boyle grabbed up the piece of steel and lunged toward the lights. "Drop it!" a voice warned. He took one more step and the gun crashed. He fell forward against the bulkhead near the ladder and slid to the deck.

I tried to stand up. Everything drained out of me at last and I started to fall. And my last thought as I slid into blackness was that now I had lost

them all. Frances Celaya was dead, and now they'd shot Boyle, and there was nobody else who knew how it had really happened.

Fourteen

I opened my eyes. I was lying on a hospital bed in a small white-painted room. It was daylight. Across from me a uniformed policeman was seated in a chair tilted back against the wall, reading a paper. He glanced up and saw I was awake.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“Eleven-thirty,” he said. He went to the door and spoke to someone just outside it. I couldn’t hear what he said. He came back and sat down again. I moved my arms and legs, and everything seemed to work except that I was sore and stiff and my side hurt. I felt the right side of my face. It was painful.

I thought of Suzy. They might know what had happened to her, but I couldn’t even ask. There was a chance she was still all right, and if I even mentioned her name it would implicate her. They knew somebody had been helping me.

“Can I make a telephone call?” I asked the uniformed man.

“No,” he said.

“Is Boyle dead?”

He put down the paper. “Don’t ask me any questions. There’ll be a man here in a minute that’s been wanting to ask you some for a week. All I’m here for is to see that you don’t run down the drain in the wash basin or through the keyhole or something and disappear again.”

I lay back on the pillow. In about twenty minutes the door opened and a big man in a rumpled suit came in. He had a tough, competent look about him. There was a stubble of beard on his face, and the rather hard eyes were red-rimmed, as if he hadn’t slept for some time. He nodded to the uniformed man, who got up and went out.

He lighted a cigarette, stared at me for a moment, and sighed. “I suppose if I killed you, I’d find out there was some stupid city ordinance against it. But it’s a beautiful thought. Who was hiding you?”

”What do you care now?” I asked.

He rubbed a hand across his face. “I guess I don’t, really. I just get scared when I think there might be two of you loose on the same continent. What was her name?”

“What makes you think it was a girl?”

“Because you said ‘he’ when you talked to me on the phone. You could see that was real subtle.”

“Then you’re Lt. Brannan?”

“I’m Brannan. I’ll see whether I’m a Lieutenant when I get back to the office.” He pulled the chair over by the side of the bed and sat down, “Brother, it’s a lucky thing for you that Mexican guy Sanchez ran out and called us. In about one more minute you’d have been dead.”

“Is Boyle dead?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

I said nothing. I’d tried, but maybe it had been hopeless from the start.

He sighed and gestured with the cigarette. “All right. You win. I was going to make you sweat, you pig-headed mick bastard, but I guess I haven’t got the heart. Boyle didn’t die until about an hour ago, and we got a statement from him.”

The breath oozed out of me, and I seemed to melt. I tried to say something, but nothing came out. “Here,” he said. He stuck a cigarette in my mouth and lighted it..

“Was he Ryan Bullard?” I asked, when I was able to talk again.

He nodded. “He was shot through the chest, and the medics said he didn’t have much chance. He asked for a priest, and Father O’Shea got him to make a complete statement. We checked his prints, of course, after he died, and verified the identity. He was Bullard.”

“Will the statement do any good?” I asked. “He wasn’t even there when she killed Stedman. He was at sea.”

“Sure,” he replied. “There’s no doubt about any of it now. It was a death-bed confession, and it all ties together. He admitted plotting with her to kill Stedman, the same way they got Purcell, but she jumped the gun when she saw the chance after that stupid fight of yours there in his apartment. He almost killed her then, when she told him about it, because it was a dumb thing for her to do. If you’d surrendered when you found out he was dead, and made a sensible statement, there’d have been an investigation that’d

have turned the two of ‘em up. It might have taken a little time, but you’d have been in the clear. But you had to take off like a ruptured duck so we spent the next seven days chasing you all over the goddamned country. Naturally, everybody thought you were guilty.”

“I know,” I said. “I panicked. Then it all started with the holdup of that Shiloh Tool outfit?”

He nodded. “Frances Celaya was a niece of that Jiminez woman Ryan Bullard knew in Tampa. When he came over here on that fishing boat that first trip back in November, he looked her up. That’s when he began to think of the holdup. He and this girl of his in Havana wanted to buy a boat. I think they had some kind of smuggling operation in mind; God knows what it was, but something crooked, anyway, since it was Bullard. Anyway, he approached Danny about the holdup, and introduced him to Frances. And I guess she fell for Danny like a ton of bricks. She gave him all the routine on the payroll operation there at the plant, and they planned the whole thing. They were plenty cagey about it, too; nobody ever did know they were even acquainted. They knew the employees would be checked out afterward. Danny lined up the visiting punk from Oakland. They pulled it off. The California hoodlum was killed, but the two Bullards got away. Danny took the money to his apartment to hide out with it until the split. Ryan couldn’t very well take it aboard the *Marilyn*. But then Stedman and Purcell came along the next afternoon to question Danny about the liquor store job.”

I nodded. “So when they found out Stedman and Purcell had killed him and filed a report saying he resisted arrest, with no mention of the Shiloh job or the fourteen-thousand they figured it was just cold-blooded murder, for the money?”

“Sure.”

“Do you think it was?” I asked.

He stared moodily at the end of his cigarette. “No. At least, I hope not. They went sour, all right, but not *that* sour. He probably did pull a gun, so they had to shoot, and then they stumbled onto the money afterward while searching the apartment.”

”Have you found the money yet?”

“Yeah. They put it in safe deposit boxes. We located them this morning.”

“Do you suppose the Celaya girl and Ryan Bullard expected to find it in their rooms?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “With the girl, I think it was revenge, pure and simple. Apparently she was completely gone on this Danny Bullard, and she thought he’d been gunned down by two crooked cops in cold blood. Ryan Bullard probably just figured he’d been gypped. He was a cold-blooded killer by instinct.”

I thought of Suzy Patton again, and I could feel my nerves jumping. “Did he confess to any other killings?” I asked, looking down at my cigarette.

“A couple,” he said. “Didn’t have anything to do with this, though.”

I tried to keep my voice casual. “What were they?”

“That seaman, during the strike here several years ago. And one of the witnesses to it. Why?”

It wasn’t a matter of her being in danger—not now. She was either already dead or all right, and telling him wouldn’t help or change anything. It would just drag her name into it. “Oh, nothing,” I said. “How did they get Purcell?”

“He left that gate open for her and she left it open for Bullard. They killed him, and then she went back out and he locked the gate and climbed over the fence. Neither of them ever showed in front at all. He says she was the one who actually shot him. So in the end, she got both of them.”

“Are there any charges against me?” I asked.

He sighed. “Not a thing, aside from assault and battery, resisting arrest, trespass, breaking and entering, purse-snatching, and illegal entry. Oh, and piracy, except that Sanchez took that boat back to whoever you borrowed it from. I don’t know where you clouted that lion-strangler’s coat you had on when we brought you in, but I’m not going to look into it.”

“I got it from an astronomer,” I said. “We traded.”

“It figures, I guess.”

“Are you going to hold me?” I asked.

“No,” he said wearily. “We had a conference about it in the Skipper’s office awhile ago, and somebody came up with a good idea. Maybe if the City Council would vote Southlands Oil a tax reduction of some kind they might give you back your job and ship you the hell out of here. That way we could put the Department back on a forty-eight hour week, and some of

us could go home and see if we're still married. That is, if it's all right with you."

"Thanks," I said.

He stood up. "Incidentally, the medics say they can't find anything wrong with you except for bruises and lumps and lacerations. Anybody else, of course, would be dead. They took some pictures of your belly, but there's apparently nothing wrong inside. I'm going to turn those reporters loose on you now, and as soon as they get through with you I'll drop you back at your apartment house."

He went, out. Six or eight reporters and photographers surged in and began snapping pictures and firing questions. It was about twenty minutes before they left. I dressed. Brannan and I went out and got in the patrol car in front of the hospital. While we were crawling through the midday traffic of downtown, headed for Forest Avenue, he turned to me with a hard grin, and said, "We could run this on the siren, if you'd like to hear one up real close."

"If I never hear one again, anywhere, it'll be close enough," I said.

He let me out in front of the Wakefield. We shook hands, and he drove off. It felt strange to be standing there in the open, perfectly free, in broad daylight, without cringing or looking behind me. I wondered if I'd ever get used to it again. I let myself in the front door and hurried up the stairs to the apartment. Nothing had changed in it, but it was like coming back to a place you hadn't seen in years. I closed the door and reached for the phone. I dialed Suzy Patton's number. It rang and went on ringing. There was no answer.

I hung up, waited two minutes, and tried again. Maybe she'd been in the bath. Or asleep. I listened to the futile ringing with a cold lump of fear in my stomach. Everything had turned out fine for me, but she'd got killed for helping me. I could see her lying there on the living room rug— Breaking the connection, I dialed for a cab and hurried out front.

It seemed to take forever to get there. When it came at last and I gave the driver the address, it occurred to me that Brannan might be having me followed so he could find out who'd hidden me. I watched out the rear window as we jockeyed through the downtown traffic and out the arterial going north. There were dozens of cars around us all the time, but I couldn't see any that appeared to be following us.

It was shortly after noon now, and warm and sunny. When we pulled to the curb in front of the apartment house, I tossed the driver two dollars and hurried up the walk. I pushed the button of 703, and waited. There was no answering buzz at the door. I leaned on it again. Nothing happened. Turning, I hurried down into the garage. The blue Olds was there in its stall. I was badly scared now. I ran back to the front door, found the manager's number, and buzzed it.

He answered. I went in and ran up the stairs to the second floor. The apartment was 203. I rang the bell. He opened and looked out. He was a big, relaxed guy holding a can of beer. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"It's Miss Patton, in 703," I said. "She doesn't answer the phone or the buzzer. I wondered—"

He took a sip of the beer. "Maybe she's not home. That happens."

"Her car's in the garage. And she didn't answer last night, either. Look, I'm a friend of hers, and I'm worried. How about going up with me and having a look?"

"All right." Then he regarded me doubtfully. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"Come on," I said impatiently.

He got a key and we took the elevator. The morning paper was still lying in front of her door. I didn't like the looks of that, either. I waited, dreading what we might see, while he inserted the key and pushed the door open. He cocked his head as if he were listening for something. Then I heard it too. It was a typewriter. It sounded like a kid tearing past a picket fence with a stick.

"Friend," he said, "take my advice and duck—"I paid no attention. I shoved past him and ran across the living room to the door of her study. It was thick with drifting layers of cigarette smoke, and she was sitting before the typewriter dressed in the Capri pants and not much of anything else except a white shirt that wasn't even buttoned. The white hair was rumpled and her face looked tired, but her eyes were blazingly alive. There were sheets of paper all around her on the rug and in the wastebasket and on the stand on both sides of the typewriter.

"Suzy!" I said. "Thank God, you're all right."

She made an erasure and started banging the machine again. "What the hell do you want?" she asked, without even looking up.

I stared at her. “I’ve been worried sick about you.”

“Oh?” she said. She picked up one of the pages, read something she had written and studied it, frowning.

“Miss Patton,” the manager called uncertainly from the front door. “Do you know this man?”

She looked up then, for the first time. “Oh, it’s you.” She waved an arm at the manager. “Yes, I know him. But what the hell is this, the middle of US 1? Or Times Square on New Year’s Eve? You’d think on the seventh floor of an apartment building with the door locked—”

He left.

“You didn’t answer the phone,” I said. “Or the door.”

“Answer the phone?” She looked at me as if I’d gone completely crazy. “I never answer the stupid telephone when I’m working. I don’t even hear it. What do you want, anyway? I thought the radio news this morning said you’d been cleared of that murder charge.”

“I was,” I said. “But I wanted to see you again. And tell you that you were right about every bit of it.”

“All right, all right.” She tore the sheet from the machine and rolled in a new one. “Now you’ve told me.”

“And thank you.”

“Ummmmhh?” she said, and the stick-against-a-picket-fence started again.

She had forgotten I was there.

I picked up a blank sheet of her paper, sat down at the coffee table in the living room, and wrote out a short note.

”Dear Suzy:

This is for the hat and coat. Thanks a million for everything. And I hope the Southern girl who hides the injured Union soldier is just half as nice as you.

Irish.”

I took a hundred dollars from my wallet, dropped it on the note, weighted it with the ashtray, and went out. She didn’t even look up.

THE END